

Apologies for Love

J.A. Myers

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F. A. MYERS

Author of "Romance of a Letter," etc.



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DEDICATION

There is a devotion to one's profession that is akin to genius. It is, at all events, a divinity that brings success. And success naturally commands attention and recognition. It is an evidence of the worth and force of the man. We all admire the one who achieves something, who does something for others, who is in harmony with his surroundings. In all games, the victor is the hero. And in the various affairs of life, the successful man is accorded something of the same place in general opinion as the victor in the stadium. Mr. Frank W. Cooley, Superintendent of the Public Schools of Evansville, Indiana, is gifted with devotion and divinity in his work and therefore wins success. He is clear in his methods, full of his profession to suggestiveness, indefatigable in his labors, strong in executive ability, gentlemanly in his attitude toward all. He has all the qualifications that constitute a practical and capable school Superintendent. No man has done a greater service for the schools of Evansville than has Mr. Cooley. This slight tribute is due him for his unvarying kindliness to the writer.

F. A. M.

May, 1909.

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CHAPTER I

“**D**O you remain long in Paris, Miss Wadsworth?” Earl Nero Pensive inquired, as he seated himself beside her and her father in the box of the theatre. His eyes like beaming lights out of shadowless abysm were transfixed upon her as by magic force, and not without a calculating purpose. No one could predetermine the end of the influences begun by this initial stare upon so beautiful a young lady by such a man.

“We leave ‘gay Paris,’ the scene of revolutions and Zola plots, in the early morning—do we not?” shrinkingly turning to her father with a smile that possessed for him more than the veneer of social exactions. He simply nodded assent, a sparkle of mystic communication from his eyes falling on her as he inclined his head and glanced away for no known reason.

The fact was not objectionable to him that English Earls paid court to his daughter, but in this day of penniless counts, and what not, seeking American daughters for their millions, he was not accepting the polished gentry on their own recommendation alone,—lavishness, fine dress, and wealthy manners. An open introduction in so public a place he did not regard as a sufficient passport to a self-respecting girl’s heart and hand.

The signal service code between daughter and father, Merrill Wadsworth, ex-United States Senator, was simple and easy to read. She flashed back the answer: "I'm not afraid of bronze lions in the way." The Earl was innocent of the establishment of any communication between these two Americans. He was intent on making the most of the meeting.

"I'm truly sorry that you go so soon," he returned, turning his glittering, gray, full eyes upon Mr. Wadsworth, which politeness required as an accompaniment of the language of his response.

"Our time-limit for our hasty trip to the continent is up," observed the ex-United States Senator, in natural business tone, seeing that his daughter expected him to make answer.

The play went on. The electric lights cast a greenish tint over the crowded audience. The footlights glared up into the face of a marvelously beautiful woman, who for a brief moment was outrivalling the mockingbird. But beneath the musical vocalization there was a submerged minor note that seemed to hurl defiance at the audience,—if not directly at the box where the Wadsworths were seated. Though attention was divided between the performance and the attentive Earl, Miss Mina Wadsworth nevertheless caught the minor chord upon the sensitive sounding board of her very responsive nature. She had no doubt of it. It affected her.

Earl Nero Pensive was dressed quite in the mode. His manners were perfect. Indeed he was a handsome man, splendid physique,—something like Meredith's Ego-

ist or Fielding's Tom Jones,—and possessed a keen sense that promptly penetrated human motives.

At one sweep of his glance he caught the *simplex munditiis* of her dress but at the same time its costly character and its up-to-dateness. There was no question about its modest modernity and its perfect adaptiveness. It spoke the worth of the girl.

“Ever since your arrival in Europe I have endeavored to meet you,” said Earl Pensive after his cursory survey, in limpid, natural language, a half concealed gurgle of bonhommie in his modulated musical tone. It was designed to be flattery, but it was “too silly” to think he had traced her through the press telegrams in all her evagations with her distinguished father about Europe. That sort of chaff must be used to catch birds of different plumage. He added: “And now in the very last minute,—just my luck.”

“Truly unfortunate,” she returned. Did she mean for her or for him? He could not determine.

And she could not know the inner exclamation of thankfulness he offered his “lucky star” that she was returning home so soon, while at the same time he was expressing his regrets to her, implied in his last remark. He had a past, and he was happy she was departing from the scene of that unworthy part of his existence.

“Who is the very lovely young songstress?” Miss Wadsworth asked after a short stupid pause. But it was an honest inquiry, and not simply the semblance of talk. She knew her name but no more.

“Clarissa Harlow, a star from your great country so productive of the marvelous,” he returned like one striving to express something jaunty.

"She wears lovely costumes and diamonds." To be sure she would say that.

"Paris is in a furore, tout-a-fait, over her beauty and singing."

"She's a model beauty."

"A perfect American type."

Mina read beneath the surface that the Earl was not *en rapport* with the charming young actress. However, this might be due to nationality. The Earl was an easy-going, blasé Englishman instead of an enthusiastic Frenchy.

There was much more talk, but at the end of the play these two people had not progressed very far even in a formal relationship. No clinging regrets had reached the stage of frame and glass upon the walls of their memories. It seemed to be a passing affair that was ended in its very beginning.

When the asbestos curtain dropped, her father took her arm and moved toward the nearest street opening. Earl Nero Pensive felt himself denied an opportunity to speak more definitely to her. He was not willing to let the curtain fall upon the drama. He had definite information of the exceeding great wealth of her father. He followed to the door. There he said, in a manner that did not restrict his speech to either one, seeking courtesies:

"I shall be in America soon, taken there by some railroad and other investments." There was no effort to disguise his motive. His eyes, upon a dead-level of indifference, suggested nothing.

She knew what courtesy demanded. "Will you have leisure to call upon us while there?"

He made an elaborate bow, in the best form of an Earl, as they parted.

He had manoeuvred long to secure this interview with this superior American girl, a girl more stately than formal, more wise than emotional, more sane than calculating, more true than fanciful, more lovely than designing, more frank than skillful. But to him the beauty of her character appealed less than her moral dollars—a new character given to filthy lucre in this commercial age of human activity. He was sane upon the subject of his pressing need of the mercantile medium of exchange, but he could not put into execution an immediate, effective method of recoup,—unless, unless, by a coup d'amour. For of course love is potent but money is omnipotent. His manner of life had not multiplied his bank notes in any very approved way. His "talent" had not been added to by skillful management. To him life was better employed spending than earning. Trite but true, "*non disputandum de gustibus*." His unqualified life had not run the gamut of amusements to the extent that money had no interest for him. On the contrary his dual life demanded almost unlimited credit at the bank, and at present he had no funds upon which to draw, unless his handsome person should prove a splendid investment in American beauty with infinite resources behind it. He was known as the "Earl" Nero Pensive. And the title might be capital for the foolish American women seeking empty titles and paying extortionate prices for them.

Abroad, it was a very practical and serviceable thing

to do,—to allow himself to be taken for his brother, Lord Elmdale, who was honored with a parliamentary seat in the House. No one could know the difference, and it took nothing from his brother and added very much to his own bankrupt credit. A roué certainly had no need of fanciful scruples, such as would deny him pleasure and gold, and it was criminal to have a conscience or be hampered by sentimental love.

I will have her, come what may, cost what may, act as she may," he resolved to himself. The bright, beautiful young singer, Clarissa Harlow, was with him in their automobile. She wondered why he maintained such bungling, sullen silence. At length she asked:

"Has your supply of smiles and good temper run out,—you the man of exhaustless ego. You seem like the gloomy end of nothing mingled with a black chunk of night and stirred with Pluto's crook."

"Few things, I confess with due composure, are better than a jest on your lips." And he slunk deeper within himself, not to invoice his moral assets, or to invent a syllogism against the purity advocates' doctrine, or to brood because it is pleasurable to be moody and selfish, but to conceal the embryonic scheme then lying deep within like a stone in a muddy river.

As they moodily flashed by the Vendome hotel, the Earl saw the ex-Senator and Mina ascend the broad marble steps, beneath the intense flaring electric light. The glimpse intensified his embryonic scheme.

In the atrium, alluding to Nero Pensive's first steady search into her eyes, she asked her father:

"Were those looks advances?"

"Estimated in dollars and cents—yes, Mina," he smiled to her.

"Well," she flouted with a shrug, a merry leer in the spacious depths of her very brown eyes, "well, the market value of the stock is—O it's a drug on the market, a very much watered stock, and so to be sure paying small or no dividends."

"I do not consider much of the British aristocracy very profitable investment just at present," Mr. Wadsworth said; "but of course I speak in bated breath—to you, Mina." The confidence was sure, secure.

"I understand. A former United States Senator—. But, all in all, how did he strike you?" She had no idea or motive to conceal from her father, and looked as frank as her question signified. A smile took off the rough edge of directness.

Perfect exterior,—oiled like a sham tongue, polished like a court favorite, graced with all social diplomacy, bold where self-interests demand courage. I know not this man; but in general titles destroy incentives to manliness and make courtliness superior to character."

"Not to be critical or serious, nor to be in a laughing mood—

" 'If there's a hole in a' your coats,
I rede you tent it.' "

However, I may never be called on—probably never persuaded—to pass my opinion of a man when he is at a low ebb,—that's my view of him."

"A product of hereditary aristocracy—a fate that

trammels," said Mr. Wadsworth, smiling archly at her conscious humor.

"Have we said what we wanted to say about him—anything direct about him?" she asked.

"If not, still we have more conclusive opinions about this specimen of titular genus homo."

As he parted from her at her room-door for the night:

"Up at six for Calais."

"Up at six for Calais," she echoed, but in no manner the imitation of his rich contrabasso.

CHAPTER II

“**E**VER since I first laid my eyes on you
I have been your eternal admirer—
worshiper.”

“You have not been discreet and
measured in selecting your idol,” and
Mina cast her deep, penetrating, calculating brown eyes
on him in a critically searching glance.

Earl Nero Pensive was too passive, and leaned back
too far in the rear seat of the touring car, and posed too
comprehendingly to convince and convict her. She re-
garded every act and word as an expxression of the soul,
and words, false or true, bare evidence of the real ego
within. She interpreted the truth of words by the sub-
liminal acts accompanying them. A glance sometimes
reveals a whole critical chapter in the psychology of a
soul. What Mina saw, rather indifference than active
mental state, was not convincing of his sincerity. She
saw what became a basis for every future judgment of
him. It was a latent, lurking smile, which she inter-
preted, rightly or wrongly, as a flattering approval of
himself over her, a conscious sense of their inequality.
It seemed to declare that it could not be otherwise, for
he was of English blue blood while she was of the com-
mon herd—titleless. But not brainless therefore, Mina
argued to herself. And the difference would always re-
main.

"Men worship true and false gods—none the less worship because a false good," he responded to her banter. He impulsively whirled his half-smoked cigar away, and the sparks flew where it fell and rebounded as sparks from a bomb painted on canvass.

"You worship a false god?" she queried, half imitating the indifference he seemed to act,—so contrary to his lip professions.

A heavy lurch of the machine over a culvert jostled both considerably, but the motorneer in goggles did not alter his face a shadow to the right or left,—but straight on—on. Their swift flight along the highway on this sweet May day in 1907 had a moral parallel in the swift flood of years along the race course of life of which St. Paul speaks. They were on the main-traveled road from Richmond, Virginia, to Walpole, the beautiful country town, adjacent to which ex-Senator Merriel Wadsworth had a noble country residence, which they named Acadie. This charming country seat was about one hour by auto from Richmond. It was in the heart of his greatest business interests.

Earl Nero Pensive was availing himself of the invitation given in Paris. But at the time the ex-Senator was absent from his country residence on matters political.

"It is very, very pleasant to confide in a god, even though a false one," said Nero in answer to her observation that he worshiped a false god.

"That, however, doesn't establish anything, for the credit or honor or worth of the false god," she argued with a modesty that disarmed the opponent of all acerbity. No, it was not a designing attitude of mind.

"We generally love truly what we worship truly."

"No doubt," she assented so readily as to excite a wonder. In fact her cunning meaning was not lost on him. He glanced up quickly. And the motive prompting his quick, uncalculated glance was detected by her. It annoyed him to know that he was surprised into a disclosure of his motive—any motive, for that matter. For an instant he reprobated himself for his undiplomatic glance. He was in too excellent favor with himself to remain long at loggerheads with himself.

"You will permit me, even in the enforced absence of your father, to say to you that it would be the proudest moment of my life to call you wife—my wife—my unparalleled wife—and present you to my family as my wife." This was intolerably cool and calculating.

"No titled blood runs in my veins, not a drop, proud to say, though I do claim to belong to the F. F. V. And I can not harmonize the fact that I am titleless with your statement of pride in a titleless wife."

He observed that she did not affect surprise, suffuse her face with angel blushes, beg for time to consider, and all that, and he was not certain how far she was laughing at him, or leading him on to see how foolish he could be, and how far below the surface she had descended into his miasmatic nature. But he knew the force of persistent courtly blarney, and assured himself that by steadfastness in his seeming sincerity he could deceive her—deceive even the very elect.

"Do not speculate on that fact, but on the other, that I am proposing to you now and laying my all at your feet, —titles, family prestige, wealth, and all I have and am.

What more can I do to convince you of my great and abundant love for you!"

He leaned forward and pretended to zeal that was artificial and to pour out his real soul into her right ear.

"Don't try."

"Is it unpleasant?"

"It may be, for all you know. At any rate it's all Greek to me, and you'll have to translate into my vernacular tongue."

"How do you mean that?"

"And do *you* ask for an exegesis of what is so simple? Then what about your Hellenic phrases pertaining to a life contract? Or is it a contract existing only during good behavior on the feminine side and convenience on the masculine side?"

"You know our English marriage laws?"

"Know better our own state marriage laws."

He was not satisfied with her keen flippancy. It smacked of a mental joust in which he felt she had unhorsed him.

"Then—I assume from your laughing humor that you do not deny my appeal for your heart and hand." He was quite too tritely formal to woo and win.

"I have not been asked for a categorical, Carlylean, everlasting yea or nay."

"What answer do you give me?"

"I do hope now you are not going to have me repeat myself, and restate what I have been answering you all along." It was plainly a mock plea.

"I am very much in earnest."

"I do not deny it—do not doubt it—do not want to."

“ ‘Was ever woman in this humor wooed.’
Was ever woman in this humor won?’ ”

“Yes, by a Richard. But not by tactless humor was she won, I can assure you, Mr. Pensive. A Romeo knows better how to woo and win than a Jacques. Even the black Moor, who had done something worth relating, found a Desdemona to hear his stories and sigh for his woes.”

He was not impeached from his selfcenter by this thrust direct. The smile on her rubric lips, lips that bore a message in themselves not of words, was faint—not feint,—and it would rub out under other conditions. At the same moment she was struggling with invisible nothings—conjectures about his nature, the gift of God, and not the man-made part of his ego.

“Those cases you cite are cases of love myopia.”

She detected a submerged sneer in his words.

“I can’t pretend to a knowledge of love therapeutics, and can’t therefore distinguish between love myopia and love strabismus; but I think I can know love with and without the fancy touches of imagination and the impressionist daubs.”

He turned a furtive eye on her, though pretending to glance beyond her at a fine farm house they were flashing by. She was glad the automobile veil mottled her face and concealed a bit of half inconsistency she knew was in her large eyes, eyes that spoke and commanded and captured. By a dual process of mind she was saying at the moment to her own secret self, the self that sat on the throne within as judge infallible of all things—the very

Supreme Self: "Sir, because you are proud and overbearing doesn't fix you perforce as correct; it only establishes the other fellow's reading of you. I want to find, sir, the real, true, genuine John in you."

He smartly responded:

"Love is madness, if Nordau and Lombroso have any significance in their utterances."

Perhaps he did not know what is said in Horace, Satire third, book two, or he would have mentioned Horace also.

"How are you on cold-storage love?" she broke in and away with a twitter in her vocalization. He felt the piquancy and intentional inappositeness of the remark. It was like a frozen guinea down his back.

"A little of it would do me," he answered numbly, scarcely attentive to the constructive purport of his words. "It's an ice-cream affair, sweet ice, as it were."

"Ah!"

What non-translatable meaning she could compress into the manner of her utterance of this word! He felt it, roué as he was, like a veritable blow upon his conscious being. This girl seemed slipping away from him, and escaping to the heights where he could not go.

The motor car swung the corner at a speed that threatened to upset and precipitate an undesirable climax, but the expert chauffeur kept steadily on—on. Both seemed unconscious of their going, just as one does down the journey of life, for they were not observing the beautiful, burgeoning scenery along the swift flight.

A thought from Longfellow's "Endymion" crossed the

clear horizon of her mind, seemingly like the promise of a bow in the sky:

“Like Dian’s kiss, unasked, unsought,
Love gives itself, but is not bought;
Nor voice, nor sound betrays
Its deep, impassioned gaze.”

He said to her “ah:”

“There is no cold-storage love—all a figure of speech and meaningless. To be frank, there is in these progressive times little sentimental love cultivated among our grown men and women. We recognize that sentimental love belongs primarily to school children, and that grown-ups have nothing to do with it.”

“That certainly is quite, quite clear, considering all that we, grown-ups, have just been saying. I still have faith in the intoxication of sweet, first, young love—that sweet bewilderment, all of heaven, best of all. I confess I take at their worth the fragments of a feast after the guests have gone and the stains of the debauch still mar the table linen. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was a little particular and exacted the best first fruits. The divine Cupid is no less scrupulous as to offerings of refuse and blemished things. They must be perfect.”

“I have just reached the strong, mature period of life, and all I am and all I have I freely lay on the altar as a sacrifice to the God Cupid you worship. I will be a Jacob and serve fourteen years for Rebecca.”

He felt the soft satisfaction of having spoken along the line of her own thoughts. In very truth Mina was with-

out fleck or flaw in her nature—a perfectly lovely creature, perfect as Eve. He was absolutely satisfied of this. He was thirty—nothing below that. She was twenty—nothing over that.

“I’m heart whole and fancy free,” was her daring, defying retort. Her first impulse was to say that a state inspector would be necessary to examine his offering to determine its sanitary condition; but this seemed too flat and she rejected it.

“And will you be mine—mine—mine—”

“Well!”

“My wife?”

“Does that mean, under your English laws, a life partner of yours?” Her calmness equaled his audacity and made him dislike it for its critical inference.

“Everything of mine!”

“That’s a different proposition from my statement of being heart whole and fancy free,—which by the by is perfectly true.”

He dropped her hand and listlessly leaned back in his seat. At length he said in a partially reflective humor:

“Do you know, you give me the impression that your heart is now in cold storage and will not keep without it.”

“Nevertheless I am heart whole and fancy free.”

He could not observe the smile that lurked beneath her veil, but he knew it was there.

“Then may be won, and by the gods of Israel and Greece and Rome and Egypt and Iceland I’ll win her hand and take the chances on her ice cold heart.”

"Put it—by all the gods at once—and I'll like it better."

"Good. And I'll say by all the gods at once I'll win you, my dear lady, time and opportunity given."

She was not mistaken when she noted that it was not love that moved him to this momentary lapse into a small semblance of emotion, but the sense of pique that she was twitting him. She was too all-wise—for a woman!

"And is this your proposal to me?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"Have I reason to?"

"And this in the face of my profession!"

"I imagined it was all a kind of side play for you."

"No horseplay about it— never more earnest in my life."

"Have you seen my father?"

"I will as soon as he returns."

"Do English customs sanction your course this afternoon?"

"Perfectly under such circumstances."

"Is this your business in America?"

"It is, I avow."

"Thanks for the comp."

"I am happy," kissing her hand encased in auto-gloves.

"I think I know papa's mind."

"Tell me—O tell me!" again kissing the glove.

"No, I'll not deprive you of that pleasure."

He kissed her glove again.

"What do you kiss my glove for?"

He looked up and stared. His dazzling gray eyes had an uncertain hue of purple in them, and she thought his slender nose spoke in its animation.

"Where is your heart, O woman!"

"Where your sincerity is, O man!"

The lapse into silence had a savor of hostility in it; and there is no love Hague to which to appeal from the decision of the Martian Cupid who thrusts spears through naked hearts painted on upper corners of scented note-paper. As it seemed to him she stood intrenched behind her father, and she was absolutely confident of his opinion, and that opinion was not complimentary to him—so it seemed. It crossed his mind that probably she knew more of him than he might like for her to know, while he is playing the Dr. Jekyll in the game. And she wondered if he could guess that her opinion of English lords in mass was not of the kind that had the unction of flattery in it. They dress well, regard good manners in the open as the sum and end of life, while at the same time they are in too many instances social criminals. Title is a passport to "good society" and the cloak for strange deeds and attitudes, and a license for selfishness.

As the Earl assisted her from the auto-car at the home at Walpole, a swift survey about the prospect and Acadie brought him the sense of munificent wealth and comfort. His mental comment was, "It's worth while." And in addition, the girl herself is so thoroughly American and so intensely alert mentally that she is "worth while" in herself.

He thought that on duly weighing the case he might

in the end esteem Miss Wadsworth more for herself than for her financial excellences. But with no commercial qualities—well, there was one side to that “proposition.” Nevertheless she was a refreshing surprise to him, and certainly as his wife would not reproach him by undignified conversation. She was lovely as the rose, rare as the beryl, beautiful as Aphrodite, cultured beyond English nambypambys, rich as Rockefeller, or J. Pierpont Morgan, or Croesus, lively as a September cricket, deft and prompt in self-defense, and charming in her wooing or being wooed. He was confident she set the style of the love confidences and sharps and flats that had just passed between them. She was a real love rebel; she cut with a trenchant Damascus blade in her conventional love wars. It was her cleverness and perfect control that made one dread a contest with her. It in a way was like meeting a steel-clad Knight of feudal times, or a warrior like Captain Dalgetty. And her bearing in general was strong and decisive and modest. There were sweet, winning elements in her, something not definable, that all men admire in model femininity. Graceful and perfect in appearance, and noble in countenance, she won attention and admiration. The elasticity and audacity of her step suggested the force of the motor within. Medium in height, an atmosphere supremely Eveish, a superior sense of the relativity of things, a marked and irrepressible good humor, she was a lovely girl. The rotundity of the magazine-made face in vogue at this moment, was relieved in her case by an impression of a slight elongation obtained at a first swift sight. Hair black, with a pale tinge of Teutonic red in a certain angle of the

sun; complexion blond, merging or shading into the brunette; a rich, gentle voice, with no whine for unmerited sympathy in it; mind responsive, appreciative, logical, inventive; real kind and affectionate; abundant health, rose, and smile to correspond.

And the commanding summer residence on the knoll that tripped gently down into Walpole was a "thing of beauty and a joy forever. It was flanked by noble trees that were at this moment putting forth a wealth of green and loveliness, a fabled miracle of charm and life. The elevation was a point commanding a wide survey and far. The many angled and gabled Acadie, with picturesque side entrances, was decorated in the soft embrace of the Boston ivy,—some said the Japanese ivy. Large oriel windows above and below, and the small-mullioned windows as per late English taste, raised the impression that it was built for broad light and roomy air rather than the special sense of proportion and grace. But this sense was swept away on entering the house.

The automobile had come up the concrete drive-way and paused under the columned shed that was neither a porte-cochere nor a corridor, as sometimes called in the south.

"Sam, show Earl Nero Pensive to Blue room, and, mark you, be constant in your service," commanded Mina, pointing to Sam, an obedient colored young man, as they were entering the reception room.

Sam knew no more who Nero Pensive was than he knew who kissed Susanna in the garden, about which the old bald heads made such an uproar. But Mina had told

him to "wait on 'im," and that was clear enough for Sam to comprehend and do.

Sam led the Earl up a broad ascent of painted steps, and directed him to the Blue room. It was simply but elegantly furnished, and the garniture of wall and ceiling blended quietly with the ensemble. A vase of fresh early spring flowers adorned the stand, and a small bust of Hera was reflected from the large pier glass that surmounted the mantel. One of Trumbull's pictures hung on the wall opposite the mantel, and a historical picture of the American Revolution was in the center of the front wall between two windows. All this the keen-eyed Earl caught at one survey of the room.

Sam pointed out to him the bath, supplied with water by a gasoline motor. When Nero Pensive had removed the stains of travel, he sat down at a window, looked out upon the grand landscape, and meditated. All men have their periods of meditation, when they deal generously in self-adulation,—daub it on as thick as one of Shakespere's characters who painted so deep that a horse could mire on her cheek. He mused:

"It will require a full hand to take this trick. It's a game that can't be played with reckless chance. She seems to have the cards stacked on me—on all men in general, on me in particular. Howerever, my title of 'Earl' is the 'joker or dog' that is to win the game for me, and I intend to play it with the most skill. I don't think she is averse to titles, though she seems prejudiced against 'degenerate aristocracy.' She don't know the desperate game I am playing, nor the desperation that actuates me. It is a considerable circumstance, and one to be

noted with favor, that this typical American beauty, haughty as sin, proud as Lucifer, calm as Socrates, smart as a villain, met me at the Richmond station with her auto-car, and alone. But she is daring as Marshal Lefebre, Napoleon's favorite fighter, and I think would not view this trip as anything more than the most commonplace affair. She evidently intends that I shall not regard the meeting me at the station unduly, for she insisted that she was only a substitute in her father's necessary absence. And now that I am here, she is to be won—must be won—a case of necessity."

She entertained him well during her father's absence,—at table, in equery exercises, in automobile tours about the country. He lingered on. And June was slipping away, and still he was the guest at Acadie.

Mina had long planned to spend the season at Atlantic City. To remain would seem as if offering him the opportunity to find the way to her heart, if he had indeed not already reached that haven.

CHAPTER III

NERO Pensive, a name rounded out with "Earl," entertained the opinion that he was "getting along fairly well" in winning Miss Mina Wadsworth's hand, if not her heart. At all events she had not ceased to give encouraging attention to his protracted siege.

He was, indeed, not seeking her heart or her appreciation, but her "daddy's dollars." Titular young chaps of the nobility, a class of drones all allow, in general are not difficult to persuade that "all things come their way," by reason of the magic of the title—a sort of Aladdin's lamp,—a sesame that opens all doors.

Now, Mina was but mischievously impressed with him. In a moment of garrulity with herself she said he was a "whole lot of fun," and it was only the more "funny" that he had not seen it. Notwithstanding he was a very clever gentleman. She had not thought of the truism that many things begun in fun end seriously.

Slightly above the normal in height, commanding, handsome, clever, debonair, active habit of body though not dapper, carefully perfumed, daintily gloved and boot-ed, always immaculately dressed in the fastidious French fashion, pointed shoes, high-waisted coats, flat-brimmed hats, scented kerchiefs, upturned Prince William mustache, and all the other things so dear to the heart of the commonplace, light-headed gentry—why shouldn't he

achieve her. Indeed, she would not be able to withstand him and his blandishments and his title. Moreover, he was a long-established Englishman; she a brief upstart American,—something like the Buntlings in “Buntling Ball.”

Down in her deepest heart Mina was confiding to herself, without the graces of figures of speech,—“The dolt!” Fine enough coat, fine enough speech, fine enough manners, fine enough temper, but frayed and seamy morals. But opinions change as well as emotions.

And he was confident he knew her mind, or knew what it would be in the not far-off future,—a pleasure he had in a self-confident prophesy of the future. So these two persons were externally quite *comme il faut*, internally quite farcical in incongruous mental attitudes. It was not a strained inharmony, rather an unworded comedy. And the melodrama was not uninteresting to her; and therein lay her snare, and she, shrewd as she was, knew it not. But this was an attitude of hers that he knew nothing about, and hence he could not use it to her injury. And so the play went on. He repeatedly urged himself upon her as the one who could best make her life happy.

The evening sun had concealed itself behind the horizon for the night, bidding every one cease the labors of the day. The Earl had asked her to stroll among the trees with him. Their gait had nothing of the jollity of youth; it had a staid, solemn air.

“I have staid long,” he said, showing teeth that suggested a growl, “and I would I knew your answer.”

“Is it important—material?”

"It—my life depends on it."

"So does mine," she suggested.

"Why do you evade? You know I love you."

"Yes."

"I've come from Europe, so powerful has been your attraction, to propose to you, and do you still hesitate?"

"Best things are hardest to obtain."

"Self-flattery," he smiled.

"I meant it so." Her frankness was like abuse of him.

"But, I would urge, and ever will urge, that you give me an affirmative. I should be more than happy could I go away with your answer whispering ever in my heart."

It would have been crude to say to him he should go away without her answer in his pocket or in his "heart," if he had any, so she altered her thought to—

"Have you seen [no, she could not say "papa," so she altered it to] Mr. Wadsworth?"

"It is my purpose to do so on the morrow. He has been here only since yesterday."

"I would suggest here that my father's views in no way bind me, except as the broader wisdom of a parent."

"I understand so much of your Americanism," he ventured.

"And he commends, but not commands, my freedom of judgment and expression." She threw out a bantering smile, looking for "fun," seeking it, inviting it.

"Noble father."

"And this privilege, or perhaps right, I intend never to surrender."

"But will you not give me your answer to my anxious appeal, before I leave on the morrow?"

"You go so soon?" archly.

But she did not answer him as he wished. It had almost become dark, when they ended the stroll and the talk, all of his planning. It was not agreeable to him that she seemed so indifferent to his departure. He had cherished the ambition [well, reader, let the language stand at that] that he would make an "impression" before this time. No doubt he had, if he could only read her mind. And, to tell the truth, she was acknowledging some things to herself.

The reason for his leaving he disclosed to no one. Merely explaining that he had immediate and important business elsewhere, he stated it was necessary for him to go. As if he had been repeatedly asked to remain.

The mail that morning had brought him several letters.

"I trust no bad news," said the ex-Senator Merrill Wadsworth, who had returned a day or two before from his politico-business trip, as they journeyed to Richmond together in the swift touring car.

"No. That is, it is a venture in brewery stocks that seems to have gone wrong."

"At present many vested rights are enjoying the pleasures of reorganization and revaluation, and some of them are proving out to have been rather shaky ventures from the beginning; something of speculative enterprises with promoters behind them. President Roosevelt, in the interest of the great general public as he views it, is stirring up these insecure financial games that pray on the inno-

cent public by threats of suit, or of exposure through investigation, and by advocating public supervision. Hence the commotion among them, deep and silent like a mighty sea-swell."

The ex-Senator, a man of large, liberal political views as well as of vast wealth, had touched upon one of his themes that he was fullest of and sanest upon. He did not deviate from it in his prolonged monologue throughout the one hour's journey along the main and well-traveled smooth road.

The ex-Senator was journeying to Richmond for business reasons, and it was pleasant to have the Earl along as an attentive auditor though a non-appreciative one.

Not once on the way did the Earl Nero Pensive address him on the subject of the marriage of his daughter,—or her dowry. It might be that—what?

That Mina had refused him; that she had told her father and mother the whole story, not even omitting the comedy part and the significant intonations of voice, and they had enjoyed the refreshing tale, given as a confided secret, to be sure; that the noble English Earl had altered his mind, or had considered it useless to prosecute a hopeless case; that he was sullenly reticent because of some unknown passage at arms between him and Mina.

He said he was going to Chicago.

CHAPTER IV

WHY Nero Pensive went to New York instead of Chicago, and why he concealed his acts, will appear in the sequel to his course.

"What in the mischief brought you over to this land of novelty and boasts, Mith?"

"I never speak out, you know, for even pitchers—."

"O, blast your pitcher's ears."

"Well—"

"Blank-blank your wells!"

This was no uncommon mood of the Earl, when he was in the atmosphere he loved best, that of the base and corrupt and morally criminal. There he was at home and at ease, a veritable Mr. Hyde—without the physician's chemicals.

Mith Gulliver, closeted as they were alone in a room in a New York hotel, went up to the Earl, put his hand to his mouth, glanced around, and stooping whispered in the Earl's ear:

"I've lost all trace of Clarissa Harlow."

"The devil!"

"Yes."

Mith Gulliver was a born liar, and his egotism even exceeded his talent for romancing; but he was withal a "hale fellow well met," and could fairly out-drink the Earl; and because of his ability to be a parasite he never

quite "fell down" in the estimation of his friend. Moreover, he was a necessary factor in some of the non-writable deeds of his "lord and master," whose hand he licked because it fed him. He was withal a cheerful liar, and a "smart Alecky chap;" a great boaster and a pretender of much shrewdness that nature had not endowed him with. He was practically valueless as a spy, but a suave pretender to a world of things.

Truth to tell he had not lost all trace of Clarissa Harlow. He lied to the Earl, so that he might say at their next meeting that he had, with great skill, found her again. His purpose was to demonstrate his exceeding excellence as a Sherlock Holmes. In addition to this it made him more necessary to the Earl, and gave him the occasion to extort more money from him.

Their conversation, scarcely begun, was interrupted by a note delivered by a bell-boy.

"Unfinished biz.—to be resumed at our next meeting—deferred or tabled," ejaculated Mith Gulliver in good-humored smiles so broad as to merit the characterization of a laughing philosopher.

"Send him up, boy," said the Earl with a frown that was neither laconic or dramatic, but mean.

In a moment Lawrence Dunston entered.

"Hello, Lawrence!" cried Mith Gulliver, just as if he had not seen this mutual friend an hour before,—indeed, had parted from him in the rotunda of the hotel to seek the apartment of the Earl. He was false to himself, if he was not deceiving somebody.

"Good fellow, how are you?" said Lawrence Dunston, keeping up the harmless figment of not having met Mith

for some appreciable time. "I'm more than delighted to see you, dear Earl," he added as he shook his hand the first time on American soil, and then shook Mith's hand.

Lawrence Dunston was an ex-Englishman, a friend of Nero, and a real gentlemanly looking fellow. But he was "himself his worst enemy," "drank wine in bowls," "put an enemy in his mouth to steal away his brains." "Every inordinate cup is unblessed, and the ingredient is a devil." "O, thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil."

"Friend Dunston, I have nothing but good will for you," began the Earl, "but I see a light of joy in your eyes that is suggestive."

"No offense, dear Earl, by your inquiry, I beg to say hurriedly and sincerely," said Lawrence Dunston with "civility" that smacked of smirking. "But my business now is to take you two gentlemen and banquet you at my last bachelor's entertainment.

"Good Lord, Lawrence, what you givin' us!" cried Mith Gulliver, the cheerful, egotistical liar, "striking an attitude."

"Shake, old pard," said the Earl.

"Put 'er there," said Mith.

"A benedict forever more," said Lawrence.

"Many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," said the Earl, a shadow of a smile scarcely observable in his face.

Lawrence Dunston had been in America several years. And he had "met his fate" and been conquered. The lovely young lady, the daughter of a wealthy merchant and a chum of Mina Wadsworth at Vassar, had con-

sented, true enough, to be a bride and alter her name from Miss Olive Pendell to Mrs. Lawrence Dunston.

But so deftly had he concealed his private character, that she knew him not. She knew not that he leaned against the brass railing at the bar and put a foot upon the support or fender at the floor and looked into the disgusting cuspidor. Even Mrs. Carrie Nation had not more definite temperance views, though more demonstrative over them, than had Olive Pendell. Lawrence knew her opinions on the subject of "drink," and he professed to her to entertain "very similar opinions." Perhaps he did, but he was not very faithful in keeping them.

So these three boon pals set out on this evening to "have the time of their lives," to "make a night of it," and "get gloriously full"—"celebrate" the prospective event of Lawrence Dunston's marriage. They "celebrated."

On the same evening, in a way approved by public sentiment and public sanity, Miss Olive Pendell, fiancée of Lawrence Dunston, was celebrating the glories of "wine and women," not in the Anacreontic style but in the approved style of "temperance fanatics," so called by some in derision. She assisted the Independent Order of Rechabites in emptying bottles of wine into the gutter. These temperance people, through the connivance of the Rechabite butler, were permitted to carry from the cellar the wine of the deceased Pendell and empty it into the streets. Mrs. Pendell and her only child, Olive, were strict temperance people and regular attendants at church, but Mr. Petra Pendell was a man who always quoted Paul's advice and never failed to follow it while

he lived. After his death much wine, French, Spanish, German, and American brands, was found in his well-replenished cellar. Mrs. Pendell knew not how to dispose of it without public shame, and in her dilemma the Rechabite butler assured her he could destroy it, and that in a way to enforce a temperance precept.

This mother and daughter, noble types of American womanhood and sentiment, were not idlers in the cause they unobtrusively advocated. They despised explosive and demonstrative aggression. It was their pleasure to counsel temperance in eating, and stoutly maintain that from force of life-long habit most people ate themselves into decrepitude. They were not foolish vegetarians, but they thought the amount of meat, or carnivorous food, taken should be limited to human bodily needs. The amount to be consumed daily should be determined by environment, heredity, pursuit, and habits. They realized that an absolute restriction of diet to grasses, vegetables, fruits, and nuts did not meet all the designs of the Creator of the human body, else why implant in man an appetite or craving for it and why design certain animals to be able to survive only on flesh? This latter fact of pursuit, capture, and tragic death suggests a divine law of opposition, of life and death, of life by death, of atonement. It is no secret to say that Olive wrote a book on "The Wealth or Aristocracy of Health," and her mother also wrote a book christened "Practical Cooking and Dinner Giving."

One day during the life of Thomas B. Reed, while he was Speaker of the House of Representatives, he was entertained by these ladies at their fine home in New

York. He had been told in advance that he would be fed on "sick-peoples' diet," and would get nothing to eat that a well man desired, so that he was rather alarmed over the prospect. However, he assured himself that one meal did not constitute a habit any more than one swallow made a summer. But he was happily disappointed. He had "vegetable fish," "vegetable butter," "vegetable meat," and other such dishes, and would hardly believe they were not real flesh even when informed by Olive what he was eating.

It was Olive's favorite idea—but never obtruded where it was *de trop*—that all people eat from force of habit too much food for the mere *taste* instead of for the actual demands of nature. An enthusiast of the Delsartian system of exercises, she and Mina Wadsworth had given considerable attention and practice to it at Vassar. It was but recently that they wore the cap and gown.

It is about as Prof. P. Thomas Nelson says,—in this day of multiplied quacks and infinitude of "specifics" that cure nothing, it is "foolish" for any one to be sick a single minute—"to hear the quacks tell it." With nature cures, vegetable beefstakes, predigested foods, nerve foods, uncooked-foods, dyspeptic foods, grain-nuts, toasted flakes, tsweibached bread, breakfast foods, malto-vito, Aunt Sally Lunn breakfast cakes, cakes, pies, and all such fancy names for catching the purse of the unwary, together with bacteria cranks, medico-gymnasts, and criminal knife users—it is no wonder the American people are a race of guilty dyspeptics.

The tent of Rechabites, to which belonged the butler

of the Pendell home, had an *al fresco* party on the lawn to the right and rear of the house. To make the evening attractive and memorable they proposed to clean out the Pendell cellar, an annex of his Sooty Majesty's Kingdom, and smash the bottles in the street. There was not a little hilarity accompanying this work,—but it was not a fanciful, direct wine-made ebullition of the emotions. Some persons, who had been offering profuse libations to Gambrinus, chanced to pass by and heard the jollity.

Earl Nero Pensive, without a word to his pals, strode upon the lawn and mingled with the jolly Rechabites. And Mith Gulliver and Lawrence Dunston, thinking it a giddy “lark,” followed their mellow leader. The lawn was brilliantly lighted by electric bulbs and fanciful Chinese lanterns suspended from wires crossing overhead. It was a lively scene. The intruders, undiscovered, entered the wine cellar with others and seizing several bottles emerged upon the lawn. They had not fairly comprehended the character of the entertainment into which they had obtruded.

Filled with alcoholic bravado, the one with the English title deliberately settled himself upon both feet, opened a bottle of tokay, held it high in the light, and cried aloud:

“Here’s to him who passes suds (beer) over the mahogany.” Quite ignorant of the consternation provoked by his action, and quite unconcerned about it, he took a long pull, smacked his lips in self-approval, and dashed the bottle away. His act did not have the appearance of conscious sanity.

“Here’s to all my friends,” shouted Mith Gulliver, following suit.

"Here's to her who is to be mine to-morrow," shrieked Lawrence Dunston in a gurgling, maudlin tone.

The Rechabites were stunned, and looked it. Moro Posey, the temperance butler, touched the Earl on the elbow and finally said:

"We think—"

"Don't care a — what you think. I'm not after your thinks, as your Bill Nye would put it," said this man of elegant presence, winning manners, and reputed refinement and culture.

"Will you kindly give us the pleasure of your absence, sir?"

"By Moses, no!" yelled the Earl, striking Moro Posey a blow in the face with a flat hand.

"But, sir, you *will*," calmly said Moro Posey, seizing the Earl's arms with his powerful and sinewy hands, pinioning them behind him, and then forcing the obtruder across the grassy lawn in strides too rapid to be courtly and off into the street with a sort of Parthian salute with the toe of his shoe.

Mith Gulliver ran after, carrying two full bottles in each hand.

"Wait for me, friend Earl," he bellowed out in hot haste.

"Will you go," said Olive Pendell to Lawrence Dunston, whom she had not recognized at the moment in the episodic confusion.

"Certainly, mum," bowing so low in mock deference that he almost fell, in his topheaviness.

Then Olive looked at him in utter bewilderment. She trembled like a leaf.

"Is it possible!"

She ran away shocked beyond all measure. It was a horrible revelation, a complete overthrow, as if the stars had quavered in dread of something beyond man's ken, to discover Lawrence, her Lawrence, in such a beastly condition and at such a place and time.

Without another word he fled after his boon companions, guilty in the secret places of his soul, and sought relief in the darkness of the street away from the spot of his disgrace and overthrow. He had told Olive with such beautiful asseverations again and again that he was "strictly temperance," and here now fate had revealed him a villainous liar. He was guilty of what nothing could ever wipe out. There was no atonement for this discovery of his sin. There was no scapegoat. He was a moral derelict, and no exegetics could make him anything else.

The rest of the night he was a regular sot, steeped to stupidity in the dreamy liquid the Bacchanals praise, the cup that inebriates.

The sweet pure girl, who was to become his wife at public service in church next day, was crushed—ruined forever! What a devil had shattered her idol! All night long she was overcome with feelings that tortured tears from her eyes and groans from her heart.

When he, accompanied by the Earl, appeared at the church at the meridian hour next day, they looked fresh in their fine new wedding dress. Lawrence allowed, and he always said, no marriage could be carried out without the presence of both bride and bridegroom, for in that exigency not even marriage by proxy could be performed.

A secret fear crept into him, when he observed the small attendance. As he stood in the church vestibule, dressed, gloved, and smooth, a letter was handed to him by a member of the family of the bride-elect. In a sort of premonitory trepidation he opened the envelope and glanced quickly:

"I have always said I would not marry a man who drank," the espistle began. "But it is worse than madness to marry a man who does not even love me well enough to keep his sacred promise—to me—that he would never touch, taste, nor handle the unclean thing. I can not marry you after what I saw last night. It tears my heart to pieces to have to say this to you, friend Lawrence, but it must be said. This also I must say, that my prayers shall ever ascend to Him who rewards a virtuous, faithful, and manly life. My tears shall ever be an oblation for you.

"It is best for you and me that our association in life be abruptly but positively ended here forever. I love you still, Lawrence, and I die a broken and shattered death while writing this cruel letter, cruel alike to you and to me; but I assure you that we still live, that hope and possibility are not dead, and that God reigns over all,—the great, forgiving God of the Jews and all Christendom.

" 'Howe'er it be, it seems to me,
'Tis only noble to be good.

Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood.'
Good-bye, Lawrence, good-bye forever!"

Lawrence Dunston turned deadly pale, when he had read this letter. More than ever before the noble girl seized his heart. She was right—quite right—eternally right. No one has a shadow of apology for drinking. “By the God that Olive trusts in, I will be a man—for her sake. And for my own. And for humanity.”

Noble fellow! Live to your prayer!

Turning to the Earl, he said simply:

“It’s all off!”

The Earl stammered and begged for the reasons. And when Lawrence finally told him, he swore worse than the devil, and said all sorts of twaddle and sharp things about Olive Pendell. As a climax to his stupid *flux de bouche* he declared that it was fortunate that Lawrence had escaped so puny-minded life-partner. Lawrence cautioned him to say no vile things of her, for he loved her still, and would allow no one to traduce so sweet, sane, and noble girl. In addition it was not best to speak ill of any mother’s daughter.

He set the clock of his life right, and from that moment was a reformed, sober man. The great shame and defeat of his life, his own doing, and that was the inconsolable grief of it, wrought out his own salvation. Under the natural law of opposites human trials are human redemption, or else drudgery, the fruits of “the curse,” is not a blessing.

“I’m going home—a different—man!”

He went home alone, a new creature, with a set resolution to achieve a good name, an added purpose to live for something. Hitherto life drifted, and that is a calamity, a tragedy that ends in ghosts.

The Earl, moody and sullen, and Mith Gulliver went away together, leaving Lawrence to his sin and his mutinous thoughts. These two, accomplished in sin, went to their room in a hotel. Mith there expanded one of his lies into a great story. The Earl was inattentive. The narrator needed no audience.

"I have no desire to boast—never do, you know—and I certainly can't tell a lie—what's the use?" Mith's tongue was unhappy unless it were wagging. "But I want to tell you my latest experience as an ex-son of Scotland Yard. It transpired in this city, and only yesternight. Late thing—no chestnut—fresh as a newly roast nut." In the pride of himself, and as a compliment to himself, he sipped a bit of the whiskey and soda on the table, and with a peculiar swallow and elongation of the neck and clasp of the lips he put down the glass with a jingling bump. "I say—."

"D— you, cut out your repetitions, or I'll put a head on you," demanded Nero Pensive, dominated by a listless, irritable demeanor, throwing his heels upon the table and linking his hands behind his head. His scowl was enough to curdle milk, some said.

"All right, my friend, all right," nodding profusely. "As I say—."

"What in the — do I care for your 'I say!' " Bored, mean, devilish, a fallen angel.

"O, yes, my friend. I see. All right. I say—I never boast, I never lie, I never get drunk, that is to say, get *drunk*, 'the clochan yill just makes me canty,' but I say Scotland Yards never turned out a better thief-catcher than I am myself. It happened this way, my friend, you

see." The fellow, consumed as he was with egotism—the parent of enthusiasm—seemed to be patting himself on the back, since no one else would do it—and he must be patted. "As I say, it happened this way, as best I remember. Years ago young George Washington quarreled with his multi-millionaire daddy, and his daddy took revenge on the boy and sent him bug-hunting, and dismissed him from home, and forbid him ever returning. The irate old daddy shipped his boy in a sailing vessel bound for a long voyage around the world, and he set a detective over the lad, whose duty it was to see that the boy should never again return to New York. The detective gave the young man freely of poetic booze, and was succeeding admirably in making a total wreck of him. And the young fellow too had just succeeded in getting a sheepskin from Yale college. After his quarrel with his father, a feud never to be reconciled, his daddy cut him off without a dollar, and he knew he never would heir a cent, except enough for daily spending money. So when he parted for good and aye from his bosom friend, Robert Burns, while hanging on each other's necks they vowed, with tears of regret at parting for aye, that if—they vowed that if they ever should make a ten-strike, or any other kind of a strike, should they be so fortunate they would divy up even with one another. Young George Washington—this ain't his real name, you see,—made a long tour around the world, a three years' trip, and in all that time never heard a word from home. He didn't want to hear. I nosed out the young heir in Lon'on, having heard that his father had meanwhile died and left his only heir all his hundred millions. The wife was

dead, and so was the daughter. The boy had outlived all of them, and is alive now. I say, I had the good fortune to tell the boy of his wonderful inheritance. He was now one of the finest specimens of physical humanity I ever saw—an Apollo Belvedere and Milo rolled into one. He said he always had money, but the daddy never told him he was supplying the filthy lucre. The lawyers, anxious to get a rich slice of the great assets of Mr. Washington, pere, defunct now and wholly unable to lay claim to his large accumulations and not able to transfer them for corner lots upon the golden streets of the New Jerusalem, or to hypothecate his earthly bonds for some central squares in the beautiful heavenly city, the lawyers, I say, had offered a munificent bounty for the return of the young heir to so much wealth, and that's partly, I say, how I come now to be in New York—as I was about to say yesterday when friend Lawrence Dunston broke in upon our confidence, you know. Young George Washington, the other name is—I forget—he is a real fellow—not a mummy in clothes. He's been around some, and he is no slouch, I can assure you, I say. He's next to your own kind self.

“Well, I say, just as I had ferretted him out in Lon'on, who do you suppose should turn up but his heavenly-made friend, Robert Burns, on a similar mission to mine. He was hunting his long lost friend, George Washington. That ain't his real name. He had drifted west after separating years ago at Yale, and by shrewd judgment and lucky investments he had secured interests in the goldfields. He was fabulously rich. He was hunting his friend, dead or alive, to share his wealth with

him. Wasn't that fine. But George didn't need a cent of it."

"Dead or alive—go on," interposed the Earl suddenly. Mith paused half astonished at the "break-in" as he called it.

"You bet you they were glad to meet. I was there and I know. (He was not). They got to going to the theatre. Both of them had utterly tabooed strong drink—cut it out entirely—though they used to booze till they had to put on the sideboards, and then some. They said they cut it out, seeing how little good there was in it and how terrible bustheads and how much downright foolishness and positive injury."

At this point the harmless Ananias hesitated, seemingly dishonestly segregating what he might say from what he should conceal in the rubbish of his mental garret. To disguise his reason for pausing he took another sip of the toddy, smacking his lips with peculiar emphasis as an appreciation of the drink that was warming the cockles of his heart. Resuming his windy recital he said:

"When they had renewed former early assurances of eternal friendship, both for this world and the world to come, they then recounted and narrated with plain simplicity their two lives lived since they had last met. Now, it was a noble sight to see and hear 'em—such awful real friends. So George is to divide with Bob, and Bob he is to divide with George. An there you have it. And so it was settled. Then, as I said, they went to the theatre and actually got to giving the awfully beautiful young operatic singer bunches of hot-house posies."

"Who was the actress?" sitting up lethargically and

yawning. Mith Gulliver deliberately took another sip of brandy and soda, delaying his answer to a provoking extent. He was weighing possible effects of his answer.

"Clarissa Harlow."

Instantly as by an electric charge Nero Pensive sprang to his feet and in uncommon animation, that needed explanation which he had no intent of giving, he cried harshly:

"Death!"

"No—all living yet, I guess—or was last time I knew. This however is not from my real detective store of secrets—I say, it is no secret, but it is my candid opinion that they are all still living."

"Thou fool—Raca!"

"'Pon honor! I'm tellin' you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," said Mith in pure self-defense.

"You seedy degenerate!"

"Thanks. Your special friend in any way you desire to use me."

"What became of them?" frowning like the dragon that Jason overcame by the assistance of Medea.

"The two men are here in the city."

"And the woman?"

"As I told you, she is temporarily out of my sight. But—"

"Blank-blank you!" And he actually struck Mith Gulliver in the face with his fist. The Mr. Hyde actuated him, restraints being off.

"You'll regret this," muttered Mith, wiping the slight bruise on his left cheek.

"D— you!" And he flung himself out of the room like a crazy loon. He rushed to the street. He took a surface car—he cared not where—anywhere. But no man can run away from himself.

Now, Mith Gulliver, sometimes named the romancing artist, had a limp judgment—a lymphatic apprehension of conditions—a pragmatic air about all he did. But he had one ready word for every one who did not fall in with his ready way of seeing and hearing things, and that word was "crank." One may believe it as a rule that it is the incompetents who are readiest with the epithet. They do not see that the term establishes nothing, is no final classification of facts, the relationship of which can be seen only in futurity. Many a one has meditated like this:

"*Your way! My way! Whose way shall prevail—is correct? You think I have no wishes you are bound to respect. And you undertake to enforce your way. Not what does the other fellow want, but what I want. My rights (not duties); not the other fellow's pleasures. No appeal from your decision; no one to appeal to. You are the 'final end.'* The other fellow is not as good a judge as you; therefore he could not arbitrate the case. *Meum, tuum.*"

You blush—guilty.

Mith Gulliver at the moment was "good and angry," as he worded it. But before he met Nero Pensive again his anger had "cooled off." It was money to him to be complaisant, complaisant to the best of his ability, which of course was no very comprehensive matter.

CHAPTER V

IT was in the Windy City, at the very time Mith Gulliver in New York was reciting his garbled bits of experience to Nero Pensive. And Mith had permitted his altogether too vivid imagination to color and add to the facts, so that no man could disentangle the truth from the romance. The pursuit of the events in their course is all that remains to be done.

Dean McBarron had an engagement to meet Clarissa Harlow, but circumstances intervened and unceremoniously interrupted the meeting. The beautiful young opera singer was expecting him. For reasons very proper to herself, and also at Mith Gulliver's advice, she for the present was known as Miss I. Single. Dean had not known up to this moment that she was incognito. And when informed of it, he was impressed that the name was taken as a whimsical affair only for the airy summer season. No more.

In vain she awaited his coming. The hour stole by with leaden feet. She worried about it. He was fickle as the wind. The very moments reproached her with his inconstancy. She said she was like all other women,—"a fool after a man—after a mere man!" Why do poor women, easy believing and easily imposed on, trust the unconscionable things at all! There ought to be a law to protect woman from them! No, that wouldn't do. They are the best friends women have, for what wo-

man dare trust a woman. Surely something has happened, or he would come. "I will not believe he is fickle," she said aloud to herself.

Hour after hour drifted away, the day entered the tomb of the past, the shadows of evening fell like an enswathement of death over all alike. Erebus stalked abroad, and night at length yielded its scepter to the gentle Horaè who ushered Apollo again upon the scene as King of day. And yet Dean McBarron was as deeply engulfed in the great general mass as the veriest uncrowned knight that handled a hoe. Not even a hint to explain his strange conduct. It could not be that he had deceived her and deserted her! The idea was inconceivable, unbearable, unentertainable, causing her to feel pulseless.

An ill wind drove furiously out of the north all day, bringing dust and disconsolateness. Æolus had come once more to claim and manifest his authority on earth. Trees bowed their strained backs, as Æolus plied his lashes upon them furiously, scolding meanwhile with a sort of Stentorian roar that fairly terrified the very soul of things. Shingles, insecure in their places, were forcibly ripped up and whirled into the street, where they were either ground to powder by the wheels or were picked up by poor children. Dust, fitful and strangling, arose in swirls and tangles, lashed into fury and drifting clouds. The people went about bent and eyeless. The dusty gust wrestled with them, enveloped them, and strove to hurl them down.

As Dean McBarron said, he "started on schedule time to fulfill his date," but the wind! It brought disappointment and disaster to more than himself.

A cutting, grinding bit of cinder cozily took up residence in his right eye, and absolutely refused to give up possession. He was in tortures, so that he was obliged to seek an oculist. He stumbled up long dark stairs into his office, where the obtruder in his camera obscura was forcibly ejected.

Once more in the street and on his way, though his eye was angry-looking and uncomfortable. Perhaps now he would reach his destination. But the *moirae* were against him. Having gone but a half block, the arbitrary, fickle wind, demanding and enforcing civility, snatched off his hat and meanly flung it into the lake. He saw it scudding away like a cockleshell before the ruthless blast that wrinkled the water surface into waves that made the shipping swell and grind at the landing. Hatless he could not proceed. So some time was again lost in selecting and purchasing a new hat. Within he was a raging furnace at his "luck." "While he mused the fire burned" in his upwrought heart. His thoughts were not the "thoughts of youth" but of a cave filled with the fierce winds of Æolus.

"I should have the patience of Penelope, or the wife of the Marquis of Saluzzo, as told by the Decameron of Boccaccio and retold by Chaucer in the Clerk's tale found in the Canterbury Tales, if I didn't feel woozy under the circumstances."

He was adding renewed animation to his quick step, passing many people groaning and rubbing street rubbish out of their best physical sense, and three or four times steering straight into some wind-warped lady pedestrain, to whom he offered profuse apologies for the mishap, but

progress was slow nevertheless. But he scurried on like his hat sailing away on the lake to some fairy land, where it would perhaps be discovered by Lewis Carroll, or the Brownies. Suddenly an arm of wind, quickly and sharply, reached down and knocked off his new hat and dashed it into the street. It fell in front of a heavy dray-wheel that relentlessly crushed its proud soul into a shapeless dead mass.

"Bad cess to you!" Dean McBarron groaned out in timid but no uncertain unction of soul. As he stooped to pick up his pitiable looking hat, a sign let go from its moorings, sailed down from above, and the wind in savage fury, dashed it upon him, postrating him at one fell blow. There he lay, not unconscious but *hors de combat*. Some ribs with vicious purpose suddenly undertook to torment him, and they succeeded. Their sudden revolution suggested to him the fable of the "Venter et Membra." Above all he hoped it was not a strike for "more pay." If it might be for a better distribution of duties than products, he would offer less resistance. The one is altruistic, the latter selfish. It was not the whole matter to proclaim their "petition reasonable," nor to say they wanted their "just rights with more agreeable conditions." So violent an announcement of a "grievance" was neither reasonable nor profitable.

He was picked up from the street and hurried to the hospital. A descendant of Democedes arbitrated the case. It was a compulsory arbitration imposed on him by the striking, recalcitrant, horny-handed, sun-browned, everyday working ribs. A truce was patched up. The Mr. Ribs in triumphant humility resumed their accustomed la-

bors. They always afterward cherished the proud satisfaction that they had achieved a glorious, gold-crown victory and their proud, arbitrary owner humbled and made to see "just where he belongs."

The wind had broken down, or so "crossed" and disorganized the telephone wires at the hospital, that Dean could not send word to Miss I. Single and explain his failure to meet her. By a messenger boy next morning he sent her a note of apology, explaining why he "missed connection." The Mercurial-footed messenger boy brought back a note. It read that the "Young lady" would call on him that afternoon. And the relief this information gave Dean permitted Morpheus to touch his eyes with his wand for the first time, since the disastrous encounter with Æolus, who unfairly hurled business signs and decrepit window shutters at him, and even tugged to upset houses on him.

All the time of Miss I. Single's call, the poor suffering mortal groaned inwardly from pain. However, in strict confidence with himself, he concealed his tortures from her. Miss I. Single, formerly Clarissa Harlow, entered in silence the apartment at the hospital where Dean lay. She entertained mixed ideas, whether to blame him for not calling on her yesterday, causing her serious disappointment or hold him—a man—in contemptuous reprobation for permitting himself to be hurt. Indeed, a woman might have met with misfortune in the open, hurly-burly, deadly street, but a man—never!

She was proudly dressed, typical of gaudy pictures, when she alighted from an electric hansom at the hospital. Dean McBarron saw her step forth upon the pavement.

His room was in the second story and overlooked the crossing of the streets. He lifted his uninjured arm and fluttered his handkerchief from the open window at her. She bowed and smiled up at him. Ah, what a splendid carriage and what a beautiful woman she was! It seemed that everybody paused to look and admire. And her costuming was admirable in its richness and perfect in colors and adaptation to her lovely figure and charming spirit. She walked, the perfect woman, the cynosure of all, a being rarely seen on earth,—almost a whim of delight and love and beauty, a chef-d'œuvre of nature.

When a nurse pointed her into the room, her smile resembled the sweetness of the morning rose and her air had healing in it. On the other hand Dean McBarron's smile had broken bones in it, though he fondly assured himself he had suppressed every vestige of pain and was splendidly good and cheerful.

"How are you, Old Sunshine?" Miss I. Single (and when this new name was pronounced she seldom failed to close one eye) delighted to call him this "jolly old name." To her he was an optimist who always saw the cruller and not an ironed-out pessimist who saw only the hole in the cake.

"I'm all O. K., and 'then some,'" he chirped.

"Old Sunshine unadulterated and sweetened with fancy, as ever."

"Sunshine is easily distributed, if we but think so" he added.

"Do you expect me to be sorry that you are here; or sorry for you,—or neither, or both?"

A row of the best polished ivory was exposed, when she lifted the curtains of her warm lips from them.

"Both or neither." His eyes rested on her in unfeigned delight. She was a joy such as fancy paints in a palace. She sat quite close and put her hand soothingly upon his brow. At the instant she lifted her eyes to the pier-glass and beheld the picture of herself and Dean,—a real living picture of Gospel flesh and blood. She admired herself, but not for the first time. She had been told many, many times that she was beautiful beyond all compare,—a very dangerous beauty.

"I thought you had laid away long ago in pickle (not gin) your boyhood smile," she said observing him from the glass. The golden afternoon sunlight came through the windows like a fluid sea of light and flooded the room, and every silver-enameled object laughed in melody as it flashed a ray in giddy, intoxicated delight.

"If you don't love me,—love me long, sweetheart, I crave you will send me an infernal machine, or a package of yellow-fever germs, or a few live stegomyia."

"Now. That don't entertain me any more. That's for children." At the instant she was in dead earnest.

"Are you pouring cold water on me? I want to know."

"Come—come, Old Sunshine. You know better than to ask that question. I wonder that you did ask it. Frankly, I think you should not have asked it. Now, what do you think of yourself!"

"Do you want me to disguise my doubts; or expose them in all their nudity? I never have many, but they

are gross in bulk when I do have them. I'm not disposed to be secretive with my doubts, you know."

"You make me smile, dear Old Sunshine. This is not the place nor the time for beautiful expressions of fancy, nor the occasion for demonstrating or exhibiting in a show-window samples of love and handing them out to the people."

"Do you know that I have a mind to tell you not to believe—for one minute—that because you are a woman and I a man, I am going to side with you,—simply because you are a woman. I know that if I say this, it will give you the right to ask—'Who told you to love me? I am a songstress!' And then you would compliment yourself for having said a smart thing to me, and for having very properly offended me. Nicht wahr?"

"Be careful—'careless,'—or you'll destroy your good rep. for optimism, and people will read the label on you—'This side up; handle with care; glass.' Then I would indeed not love you." She was dividing her attention between him and the glass.

"True." He looked out the window as he said this, saw the stream of confusion, and felt the power of the mill that grinds to powder like the friction of the stones in a moraine.

"But I come not here to talk. You know too well the story of our thralldom." She smiled at herself in the mirror.

"Too well."

"Have you found *him*?"

"No!"

"Mith Gulliver told me *he* was going to Chicago." She looked serious for the first time.

"Told me the same."

"Is he here?"

"If so, he's carefully concealed," he answered.

"Escaped us for the nonce," she mused.

"You have heard he's engaged to the girl of many millions?"

"No!" most stolidly. "But I suspected as much."

"She buys a title."

"Without a man," she said bitterly.

"She should know this fact."

"She *will* know."

"How?"

"I'll tell her."

Her eyes glazed, her lips met in decision, her voice was set and stern, her frame became rigid and intense, she was full of unwaveing determination.

After a pause, and after she had again put her palm softly and soothingly on his forehead, giving the impression of a clinging touch, she gave her plan:

"I go at once to Washington City. You I am confident will soon be out of this shocking place and follow me. Let me know, dear friend, if you need me. I must go to-night."

She clasped his sound hand. The thrill was always in her clasp. It was a sort of magnetic soul charge. It brought men to their knees to her, figuratively speaking.

She arose. Looking what she dare not express in so public a place, she pressed his hand, dropped it, and simply said:

"Good bye."

CHAPTER VI

THEY were sitting on the beach at Atlantic City, the afternoon sun mellowing the scene into a divine glow, the bathers splashing in the comers or stalking upon the shingles like some amphibious bipeds not yet discovered and described by the vigilant naturalist.

The water, sea-green and peculiar, dreaded as the relentless realm of Poseidon, mysterious as the source of stories such as the "Ancient Mariner" and "The Ballad of Carmilhan" by Longfellow, gave Prof. P. Thomas Nelson a sense of vastness and might and fury as he cast his meditative eye in Byronic sweep and his fancy-weaving imagination out upon—far out and over—the broad expanse. He could not deny its fascination. He caught a momentary glimmer of the sense that moved Byron's pen to conceive so many things about it.

"Clever Hesperus," he said addressing the man seated near him, an acquaintance extending little beyond that formed at summer resorts, "I have long admired the majesty and persistence of the sea. I am virtually overwhelmed in the contemplation of its magnitude and power."

"Indeed, my friend, not finding fault, mark you, with the Almighty, still I desire to say, I have not been able to comprehend why there should be a necessity for so much more water than dry land," said the fantastic man,

Clever Hesperus. He was so perfect and bookish in the enunciation of the letters "t" and "d" and "p", and in the over-accent of the final syllables "ed", "on", "en", and "st", that his intimates nicknamed him Mr. Exact. Comically fastidious and prim in speech, and exact in *all* things, and finicky and precise to a laughable extent at times, he was a refreshing personage and character study for Prof. P. Thomas Nelson. One can scarcely believe the singularity in this man's utterance of words. He knew it not. Its effect on others was much like that of laughing gas. It was so exceedingly well pronounced that it exhibited studied and bookish effort rather than habitual accuracy. So many facial contortions, puzzling to everybody to divine the reasons for, accompanied his labored expressions to be bookishly correct. He was not a character who won friends by emotion,—emotion had all been educated out of him, evaporated into emptiness,—but who approved himself to others by his clammy intellect,—if indeed he ever won genuine sympathetic glow from anybody.

"The sea!—I have always felt when looking on its face, when it is not angry, like shouting as did Balboa when he first beheld the Pacific," said Prof. P. Thomas Nelson, a concealed smile lurking back in his manly, mobile, noble, intellectual face, and his eye suppressing the twinkle that would betray him. Not for the world would he be betrayed to Mr. Exact, who was a shrewd-minded fellow but an egotist,—of the mild type, however. The Professor brought one foot upon his knee with a sudden effort, and put his hands behind his head, causing his hat to set-

tle close over his eyes. Clever Hesperus looked an exact look at him. Nothing.

An exact man is a critic, of course, and a critic is always a bore.

"I can't (cawn't, he said) say that I admire the sea. Men drown in it," he said.

"Men should not be guilty of such an offense against the law of nature." The Professor smiled jestingly.

"I perfectly agree with you there, my friend." So exact the letters fairly bounced from his lips with sibilant hisses and explosive dissonance and frictional utterance and glottorial sound. He trilled the "r" in the word "friend" a little excessively.

All at once in startled haste Prof. P. Thomas Nelson sprang up, looked at his watch, and ejaculated:

"My!"

"My friend, I do not comprehend you with intelligent exactness."

"I don't comprehend myself, I must say."

"I do not doubt it." The "t" at the end of each of the last three words was singled out for particularly explosive, noisy breathing.

"I didn't presume you would."

"I could not."

"Of course."

And the Professor hurried away without any more ceremony, leaving Clever Hesperus alone with his exact meditations. After a few brisk steps the Professor again manifested signs of absent mindedness. He paused with a sudden hitch, turned round, hesitated, turned back, whirled again, and again turned forward, and then re-

sumed his walk with feverish step. At first his conscious sense was that he had forgotten his hat, but on better evidence he found it on his head.

He soon reached the neat summer cottage of ex-Senator Wadsworth, occupied now by his wife and daughter. Mrs. Wadsworth was a woman of rare excellence and smoothe judgment, quite competent to decide for herself without being affected with the foolish thought, "What will the people say!"

It was to this cottage that Prof. P. Thomas Nelson bent his quick-moving feet. He was already, a little behind the time agreed upon to take a ride in the automobile with Mina herself. Something of a physiculturist, preferring the Delsarte plan, she had the courage to drive the machine herself, and sometimes to go at a furious speed-gait. There was a little of the bold dare in her blood.

The afternoon, bending low toward the closing ceremony of day, was splendid for a swift outing. The air was balmy and refreshing. The general tone of nature was inviting and invigorating.

The Professor was at her left. The rear seat was unoccupied. Was he a love idler, a dangler around the torch.

"Lovely time for speeding a little," he said, enjoying the flight. It seemed they were little more than "hitting the high places." The country fairly swam backward. There was no enjoyment in the speed, except the sense of wonderful passage through the air.

"And with muscleless horses that never tire," maintaining a firm, clear view ahead.

After a twenty-mile spin through the variegated, crop-crowned country, they turned back. There was a pretty white line of dusty road ahead, and a swirl of dust hung in a long ribbon marking their flight. For a little ways they seemed to skim the earth. But for the occasional heavy lurches, it might be they were flying through the air. The passage was too swift for talk. They were hardly permitted to think. The professor wondered how long the daring soul at his side would protract the dangerous flight. Was such a spirit of venture perfectly normal? No, he was "not in short, catchy breaths," if he were asking himself as to her normality.

Now, down the white line ahead stood an automobile. As they approached nearer, it seemed a breakdown. Still nearer, they beheld two young people, perhaps lovers. Evidently they were in distress.

"Somebody in real straits," he said. They took an easier gait. The distress of others is always cautionary.

"The uncertainty of these machines is a source of unhappiness. This uncertainty in some degree spoils the fullest enjoyment of the ride." She applied the idea in a general sense.

"At any rate it means the garage."

"Mentally it means the moral reformatory," she philosophised.

Long—more than two years—this man of culture had been a shining gallant, and Mina was unable to harmonize his silence with his constancy of attentions. He was a man of great learning as well as of college titles. As a raconteur he shone. But on Master Cupid's affairs he was singularly reticent. Attentions of a special char-

acter from the Professor were popularly viewed as a compliment, but Mina was almost persuaded that he was either a trifler or possessed in a small degree the affections that move most men. She was half inclined to view him as a love defective.

"Yes," returned the Professor, "as the Congressman said, we never know where we are *at* when we are out."

"Perhaps these people ahead of us are painfully conscious where they are *at*."

"In another sense they are, no doubt, wondering where they are *at*."

"Does any one know where he is *at*?"

"In general, no," he answered. He thought of his wish, and she of hers.

They stopped at the side of the motionless machine. An accident of any kind is a real introduction of everybody to everybody without ceremony.

"How are you?" laughingly greeted the Professor, alighting from the automobile with a spring that demonstrated his athleticism. In fact he was a fine-looking man, tall, commanding, a sort of Prof. Wilson, alias Christopher North. There was a scholarly cast in his face, and his large, great, black eyes, that almost stared at times and seemed not to drop their lids together, had an effect much like clasped hands drawn apart with a lingering cling. His hair was black as midnight, and his face was dark with an aristocratic sun-bronze. It was, too, the bronze of great, abounding good health.

"How are you, I say?"

"Anything but moody just now, of course," laughed the young lady. Her liquid voice, giving the sense of a

lick with the tongue as an animal licks its young, caused the Professor to look.

She was a lovely woman, almost sinfully beautiful, and her face was magnetically charged with a captivating smile. Even—even Mina noticed and noted her exceeding loveliness.

And the accident seemed not to have perturbed her in any appreciable degree. Her partner looked a little sulken,—upset in temper by the unforeseen accident; a better manifester of his feelings; of less ability than his lovely friend to resist the effects of untoward conditions.

"I feel very much like pale restaurant soup," he said. She looked at him.

"Restaurant soup is usually made of a pail of water boiled down on both sides, to which is added a single lonely bean, and the whole let simmer. If too rich, more water is added. The water is then dried and served hot."

She looked at him with a gilded twinkle, and passed around the dead machine to Mina, who still held to the wheel.

"These birds of passage," she directed to Mina, "are coy and uncertain as woman."

Mina was either intently admiring the unselfish beauty of the girl, or intently objecting to it as a dangerous possession. The Professor heard her observation.

"Of course you will ride back with us," said Mina in practical manner.

"By your kindness—thanks." And she at once bounded up into the seat beside Mina. A marvelously sweet, frank smile illumined her lively face.

She took a swift, observing look at Mina, and beheld a

lovely young woman, richly and modestly dressed, a clear, guileless, deep brown eye, a face of rare intellectual beauty and refinement and openness, a winning manner, and an attractive bodily atmosphere that eludes all description. She saw a noble character that she felt she could always and a day be friendly with and enjoy.

"How fortunate that we came up just when we did," said Mina. She was not unconscious that her idea had other faces.

"Better to be born lucky than rich," and the smile expanded into a ripple of laughter.

"Your name?" queried Mina.

"My name! It matters not. A rose by any other name, and so forth. They call me Miss I. Single." She laughed. And so did Mina. It was an odd name.

"I never heard such a name before."

"No?"

"My name is Mina Wadsworth." For one brief instant, turgid with surprise, Miss I. Single stared—*stared* at her. The act took the form of suspicion in Mina's mind.

"I am pleased to meet you. I've heard of you. I hope we will know each other better."

"Is your stay here brief?" inquired Mina.

"Not necessarily. But I'm whimsical."

This was said with a mocking smirk that was meant to deny her words. Miss I. Single was in fact seeking Mina. How fortunate the incident that threw then together so informally. She had a great secret for Mina. Selfishness actuated her, but she anticipated no benefits. By the double process of mind that everybody exercises

she was congratulating herself on the automobile mishap, thankful that misfortune had thrown them together on the public road instead of social formality in a circle of people. The bars of reserve never exist where accident throws people together. Mina knew nothing of what was in Miss I. Single's mind and heart.

The two men had not progressed so rapidly in linking inner emotional arms. They were yet groping round to find each other in the social midnight,—strangers still. The glum fellow maintained his reserve and clamminess. The Professor, extremely sensitive, wished to know no man who did not exhibit an equal desire to know him. He so far had existed without him, and he presumed the future would not be particularly dreary should the taciturn fellow's personality not be thrust into his life. But he was generous in thought and feeling, and perfectly willing to meet any one half way in establishing and ratifying social treaties.

"Mikado," called Miss I. Single, "come here." In a freakish instant she once nicknamed Mith Gulliver her Mikado, and since then she called him that oftener than his real name. "Unless you are convinced the machine is simply playing 'possum and will run away if you leave it, come here."

"O, no. I say I think it's quite dead." He approached, followed by Prof. P. Thomas Nelson. "I'm positive it's quite dead. And when I've made up my mind, it would better be dead, I say. For when I've made up my mind about a thing, it is about as cleverly near the real fact as it is possible to be."

Well, Professor, you need not wish to know much of this untutored individuality.

"Mr. Mikado, I have great pleasure in introducing you to Miss Wadsworth." The effusiveness told him something. As an undercorated detective his aliases were many, but he would not have corrected his name now had she called him Mr. Hog.

"Pleased to meet you—indeed I am. I've heard of you before; I say I've heard of you before. Your great popularity has preceded you, you know. Very glad, indeed I am, to meet you—to have this very great pleasure."

The fellow's egotism made all necessary lies no lies to him, as the German folk saying has it. Clever lies were moral achievements.

Mina looked at him, half pained, half wondering. Was he quite level, or was he playing deep, shrewd, mysterious, unfathonable pleasantries. Did he regard everybody as simple minded as the Rudder Grangers? She suspected him. Something put her on the defensive, and she was ever thereafter within her fortifications when he was present.

"Prof. Nelson, Miss I. Single," Mina said as soon as the egotist and liar subsided.

Mr. Mikado, Prof. Nelson," said Miss I. Single. "And now all minds being relieved, let us be dismissed. Hop in, gentlemen, while yet the door of mercy is open."

Miss I. Single was in a giddy good mood. Prof. Nelson at once saw, not only an exquisitely gowned, beautiful woman, of uncommon vivacity and not a little contempt for men, but a smart, gay, giddy, queenly Emilia. She was apparently absorbed and misled by dress, perhaps

foolish about what she wore. She was not aware that William Allen Butler had cleverly satirized "Nothing to Wear." In his calm, mature judgment she suffered very much in comparison with Miss Wadsworth—lost in native gift of mental strength and so of sound views of life. Her round pearl eyes, bordering on the dark, were sharp, laughing, flashing, cutting, tender, capable of distressing meanness. There was a heroic strength in her young red lips, and a winning grace and captivating smile that kissed the beholder; an abandon and daring in her firm chin; a nose that sneers and defies and braves,—perhaps a little impudent. Blondined hair that was heavy and full and puffy. A trim figure—more than that—a perfect form for a model, lithe, elegant, divine; not tall, not short, not stout, but round and complete—something that men love and carry away with them. Still, there were some elements about her, as about every one, that could not be accepted except on approval.

Mina saw, with no intent of seeing, that Prof. Nelson was furtively summarizing Miss I. Single's natural assets, and she wondered what the notes were upon his mental notebook. The conversation went right on.

"Your remarks, Miss I. Single—beg pardon for the shoppish remark—suggest Hawthorn's railroad to the Celestial City," said the Professor in a tentative manner.

"Eh! How?" There was cunning in her arch confusion at the enforced confession of ignorance. She was not difficult to read. She was plainly written in English, and not in the wedge-shaped characters upon the bricks found at Babylon, Mosel, and Ninevah.

"You speak of going, and Hawthorn has a fanciful

train going to Paradise. And, too, Macdonald, the temperance candidate once for President, had in his almanac a picture of a visionary train to Hades."

It was her great and proud ambition to make conquests of fine-looking men, and every thought had a man in it kneeling in love to her. She knew that all men are susceptible to the soft whispers of Oberon.

For her conquest of this careful, shy man, the ride back into Atlantic City was far too short. She was perfectly assured as to the relationship existing between him and Mina, and she set it down at once that he was a dangler after her. But as to the extent of his conquest of the acropolis of her heart she could of course not divine. She was decidedly pleased to see this state of things. It was a possible way of forestalling the unhappy schemes of the wily, unprincipled Nero Pensive. So she was less particular about captivating even the passing fancy of Prof. Nelson. She had not the shadow of a doubt but she could do it. She was formulating plans by that dual process of mind for circumventing her enemy, even while seeming quite gay and featherheaded to the Professor.

Darkness had shut out the day now, as if some monster, some heartless creature of Frankenstein, had erased all light from nature by a magic touch.

Mina and Miss I. Single, alone, were seated near an arc-light, around which a vast multitude of insects circled in the confusion of light-madness.

"An illustration of humanity seeking more light," observed Mina.

"Men or moths around the Emilias," said Miss I. Single, carelessly assuming a tone of philosophical heresy. "I

see you have moths around you,—if the flash of the diamond on your finger means anything.”

She was feeling her way. That might be a gift of the Professor; and it might be of Nero. Mina shuddered, and she could not conjure up a reason for it. At the same time, and without warrant, she put the sparkling stone beneath her other hand and laughed. Mina forced herself to believe, on a careful analysis a little afterward of her act, that she giggled—not laughed. This annoyed her.

“I shall not deny or affirm.”

“Perhaps it means a trip to Europe as Miss and a return as Mrs. Nero Pensive, wife of the ‘Earl.’”

She was feeling. A singular emphasis curled her lips as she uttered the name “Earl,” and Mina quickly perceived it. Then Miss I. Single knew him, and knew something of him. Ah! Perhaps now she would hear great things of him. There was a pleasure in the thought. It was a bit of good fortune to have met this young lady.

“Perhaps. Who knows,” disposed herself to query and prolong the farce. Her shrug might affirm or deny, as you like. She went on: “I like Paris very much, and have long said I would be married there rather than in my native country.” She could not know the effect of her words.

“It is a splendid ambition,” said Miss I. Single with a latent sneer. “To marry some nice young man and settle down to a beautiful home and a nice lot of kids!”

In her mind she was saying that if this noble, grand young lady should marry the “Earl,” it would be “cruelty to animals,” and their punishment would be equal to their

sin against gallant nature and social ethics. "They'll both be stung," she commented mentally.

"When I marry, it will not be to disprove or confirm President Roosevelt's race suicide theory," said Mina in a tone meant to reproach all mercenary marriages and all unions for convenience. "I believe in the love marriage most emphatically, and I shall never marry, if, etc., from any other motive."

Miss I. Single looked at her, searching for the truth that lay beneath and independent of her expression, and wondered whether she was firm and peculiar enough to make her formed words a compass and guide and bond for her life. No doubt of the mental and emotional force of the girl, nor that at this moment she firmly meant what she had pronounced. But what would she do under other conditions the next moment.

One more thing the opera singer craved now, the one thing she had come to find out, and that was whether this sweet, pure, good, strong-souled young lady actually loved the "Earl." And this would be revealed by her unconscious little acts and not her words. And acts are capable of so various interpretations. But whether Mina did or didn't, Miss I. Single, known in stageland as Clarissa Harlow, had vowed a vow that henceforth she would defeat the man at every turn he made in life. Hers was a deadly and eternal feud and she had ample reasons for her hatred. But reasons and justification of conduct are vastly different things.

"The Earl is a very complaisant fellow," she said, looking searchingly into the depths, the very arcanum, of Mina's soul.

"No doubt of it."

"He is said to have titles and great wealth?" inquired the new-found acquaintance.

"I have heard as much." Mina was now perfectly assured of the pump. It was gliding into the comedy.

"He has a brother, I'm told, at present in the House of Commons."

At this Mina "sat up and took notice," and Miss I. Single quickly observed the note of interest.

"I had not heard it," subsiding.

"No?"

"No!"

Miss I. Single imagined she observed a pinch of pain on Mina's brow, and a look of wonder in her eyes, and a faint tint of white on her lips. That was all.

"Yes. His brother is a real flesh and blood member of Parliament," Miss I. Single said.

At this juncture in the conversation, just when Miss I. Single was about to triumph in her object, Mr. Clever Hesperus came upon the scene and interrupted the revelation. How unfortunate! How stupid in him! But how could he know. And if he had known, would they be assured he would not have done the same thing?

He lifted his hat, and begged in intonations that fairly caused Mina to scream with laughter:

"I beg you, ladies, pardon me. I assure you it has been by no design that I intrude. I hope I do not obtrude myself on you. Will you be fair and tell me, or diplomatic?"

"Indeed no," said Miss I. Single. It is unfortunate that her name can not be written always just what it is.

"Welcome, sir," said Mina sincerely.

"I thank you with abundant thanks, ladies," bowing very low.

The fellow was a bachelor, thirty-one years old, financially limited to the moderate comforts of life, and he went about approving himself to no one in the manner he would like to be approved. He was too cleverly precise to win favor, and he never doffed his dignity long enough to discover himself,—who or what he was, or conclude that he might be nothing in the long run. He was not even cleverly eccentric, or good-naturedly unconscious. He never failed to profess absolute correctness of himself and to go entirely by rule,—correct in his faith, honor, honesty, duty, acts, words, deeds, feelings, when everybody doubted him. No one could present a fact that was an absolute stranger to him. He was too accurate to be accurate. Seating himself near them he looked up at the light, but did not see it, and said:

"I am a very precise man, ladies, and I always make it a point to speak to ladies and look directly at them when speaking." His eyes came down from the light to their faces.

"Just so," said Miss I. Single so solemnly that Mina concealed a smile by turning away.

"Poor man," thought Mina, "to regulate his life by rule, and by that method regulate out of it all sweetness that flows from hearty, honest emotion."

The man was tall and thin, due to regularity and rule and the juggernaut of self-criticism, no doubt in some measure, so thin that a wind would fairly blow through him. He had been so regular in his habits that he developed

dyspepsia and pretty nearly regulated himself out of the world.

"I have been complimented, ladies, for my fine abilities to manage large commercial enterprises. A phrenologist once told me I could carry anything to a successful issue."

"No doubt. And he knew," assented Miss I. Single. Both young ladies wondered. For one thing to his credit, his speech was suggestive and set one to thinking. Mina wondered whether he had any sharply defined mental qualities beyond his egotism. He had evidently not profited by his "very great managerial qualities," and she wondered whether he had not managed everything to death commercially as he had matrimonially—managed business dead, managed love out of the home, managed happiness by rule, and managed emotions by the double rule of three or some other mathematical formula.

"Now, I am prepared to say I am no egotist," he began. But his speech was interrupted by the approach of Prof. Nelson. The conversation ran on.

"I heard a certain woman once say," interposed the Professor, when expectation invited his speech, "that she was so perfect she couldn't do a wrong, and therefore couldn't acknowledge she ever did a wrong, for according to her casuistry that would be a lie and therefore a sin. Her logic was good, whatever her practice. The perfect one is essentially a selfish and egotistical nature,—willing to lay *all* blame on the other one, who of course is less perfect and therefore more liable to error, and unwilling to lay any blame on beautiful and perfect and lovely self."

"Uncharitable." One word gave full expression to Mina's thought.

Miss I. Single was *auribus erectus*, on the alert to detect the slightest hint suggestive of the real relationship of Mina and Prof. Nelson. But her diligence and keen exercise of her uncultivated detective faculties discovered nothing that had either a positive or a negative character. Mina was not consciously or unconsciously confessing just then anything to her new acquaintance. She was still less willing to convey anything to her about Earl Nero Pensive, though she confessed she wished to hear what this girl knew about him. She was almost confident there was some story behind all. It was not proper to remain taciturn. She half surmised that silence would be interpreted to mean more than would be true or pleasant,—perhaps distorted in a confession absolutely false.

"Uncharitable," the Professor echoed.

"Uncharitable," mimicked Miss I. Single.

Clever Hesperus sat in mathematical silence.

The conversation was not prolonged after the Professor came. He walked with Miss I. Single and Clever Hesperus with Mina. Mina arrived home first.

No state of feeling or fact developed in their walks that had any bearing upon this story.

Mina retired with her mother. She was a mother of whom Mina was proud and who was proud of her daughter.

The Professor bade Miss I. Single good-night at her cottage door, without the usual preliminary fringes, and hurriedly walked away.

CHAPTER VII

“YES, I’m going to Philadelphia,—I say I’m going to Philadelphia.”

Mith Gulliver, one of whose aliases was St. Townsen, addressed Miss I. Single. It was news to her. It was the morning succeeding the automobile breakdown. The young lady addressed was on the front step of the cottage she occupied, putting on her gloves. The fellow was standing near and in front of her.

She had no suspicion of his treachery. He was a paid spy in her service, and he professed great fealty to her. At that very moment his plan was to go to New York and report his latest about Clarissa to her unfaithful friend, the “Earl,” and include what he knew about Mina.

“To Philadelphia! What for?” looking intently at him, surprise transfiguring her countenance. She rubbed the finger of the glove a little more briskly to press it into place. “You know me, and you know my faithful service to you,” glancing up into her eyes a single second. “You know, I say, I must find out about the Earl for you, and I have a tip that he is there. And you know I never do things till I do them, and I can’t tell you for certain till I see him and know. And so you see, Miss I. Single,” glancing round as if from sheer instinctive and professional habit of precaution, “you see I’m going to

Philadelphia at once to find out by ascertaining if he is there—see! He must not know, see, that I'm piping him."

"When shall I hear from you again?"

"As soon as—as—as—I must find my man, you see. And if I have to follow a clue and run him down, in Chicago or San Francisco, or where not, I say I always do it, you know. I never fail,—I never have, I never will. I'm right there."

"See here, Mith—"

"Sh-sh-sh—," putting his fingers on his lips and look-back at the door and windows. It was a work of supererogation. No one had heard his name "Mith," when she pronounced it. He knew that. It was not dread; it was caution.

"See here, Mith," disregarding his precautions, "I want square deals. I need no warrants of your efficiency and fidelity, nothing but the information I pay you for."

"Sure I understand. You want to know—know all about it—know the whole truth—know nothing but the truth. Yes, I say, I understand. I never miss fire. I'm always where least expected (no doubt of it) and at the right moment. I say, I understand."

"I want no clues; I want facts" She had corrected the wrinkle in her glove finger.

"Sure. No clues, no guesses, all facts—facts."

"Success. Good-bye."

His bow had something of the mercenary in it, and the flanges of his knee joints were not stiff.

"Good-bye," he endeavored to smile back as he fairly fell down in his haste. His glassy blue eyes gave forth

a note that jars on the conscious essence of most people. He did not mean to be repellent, but he was and he knew it not; and if he had, he could not have corrected it.

He was in the service of Nero Pensive. First he was to prevent Clarissa Harlow from finding him, and next he was to find Dean McBarron for him. Clarissa Harlow engaged him to locate Nero Pensive for her and not reveal Dean McBarron to Nero. It required an efficient liar to fill so difficult double position. He was a competent man for the job.

Nero Pensive was consumed with desire to be with Miss Mina Wadsworth at Atlantic City, and he had recalled Mith simply to find out more about the real situation there. He was not competent to find pleasure in many things; blasé was already in his blood. He found a small degree of stimulus in gambling and leading a fast and gay life; and it was his habit when he lost heavily to booze heavily. In a moral sense he was a dangerous man to be allowed to run loose among the pure, innocent, decent, mind-clean, heart-white young ladies, for he had no belief in anything good, was skeptical, false, selfish, unprincipled, but—polite. That was the best could be said of him. He was a dashing, reckless, careless man, unconcerned for reputation or popular opinion or private opinion. A double at times, a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde—he was “the limit.” His was an unqualified life; and he was only thirty years old. Money had enabled him to exhaust himself and all there was worth while in life in his brief span. The rest—what was it! What was it not!

But his personality was not the repellent pole, setting

others instinctively in opposition to him, for he was companionable when he chose. It was a dangerous companionship for ladies. His latest hobby was to collect naughty novels.

CHAPTER VIII

PROFESSOR P. Thomas Nelson was on the pinnacle of intellectual delight, when he was in a discussion of lighter literature with Mina Wadsworth.

On the morning that Clarissa Harlow was saying good-bye to Mith Gulliver on her cottage steps, in a decisive, business-like manner, Mina and Prof. Nelson were coasting leisurely along the beach, so to speak, now and then jostling elbows in the careless saunter. It was a beautiful, sunny day. The waves dashed up in their eternal unrest, and strove with the shingles. The sky had a divine blue in it, and its restfulness was in severe and icy contrast with the waters below. It was ever the old story of the firmament and the waters beneath. They were eternal facts that occupied the Creator's mind. God was still present in his works.

"Who is your best story teller?" he asked. The question was not abrupt. The conversation preceding naturally suggested it.

"Among the Americans,—and America first forever,—I can't omit Harold Frederick. I know he has not strode into popularity with a sort of Frankenstein-monster tread, but I like the splendor of his force and his trenchant sentences and his stories that glow." Mina was serious in this.

"Where do you class Bertha Runkle?"

"In the literary attic."

"Of course one who can't write a successful story, can't successfully criticise one," the Professor argued. "Now, your story, 'The Nobility of Love,' met with popular favor at once, and therefore you are competent to speak," he said, thrusting a thumb in his side coat-pocket and glancing at her. He was swayed by a dubious movement of emotion within.

"That! O that story! I never had any confidence in its sanity or its need for being. It was too trifling to be serious or worth while."

"It is a real, unobjectionable, carefully told story, and unlike most ephemeral stories of the hour that deal with the unhappy and the moral derelicts it is a pleasing, noble, elevating story eliminating moral criminology and dealing with happiness as a motif."

"Is that the way it touched you, Professor?" looking at him, pleased with his delicate criticism.

"It did more. But your motif was what appealed strongest to me. It was a great lesson in genuine happiness up to date. Melissa was a sweet, redeeming character in it, and she was a born optimist, it seemed to me. Some stories paint the wrong, and in that way teach the right. Yours dealt positively with psychological, subliminal happiness, as I read it."

"I had an idea when I wrote that, I wish to say, that I could teach negatively the good of life by presenting contrasting moral defectives and erroneous motives in the personæ. The style of the person, the spirit and character of the story, the atmosphere of the life revealed, and the blessings of both good character and good sur-

roundings were ever present when I wrote." Her feet seemed lighter somehow.

"Did you have a real person in mind, when you drew the lovely, perfect Melissa?" He thought of herself.

"No. She is a composite being,—all of whom are real and living to-day."

"The wind of commercial-made popular favor has blown the common, slight stories of the day into a farcical attitude. No stories of this day have the sentimentalism of Scott, Miss Porter, Miss Austen, Miss Bronte, Mrs. Roche, even Mr. Holland, and very many more. Eternal love is the one and only permanent element in any enduring tale,—not the style, not the great wisdom of the writer. As for his wisdom, there have been wise men before him. And his egotism is stale, unenthusiastic, uninspiring stuff. Usually it is ice put upon fire."

"Go on, Professor."

"Literature now has a sort of smart Alecky twang, and it leaves a false taste. Nobody wants to read essays, or sermons, or economic problems, or scientific discussions, or psychologic analyses, or sociologic disquisitions in stories. These he can get in special volumes upon these subjects. But he in truth wants to read about intrigues, love dilemmas, private lives of neighbors, and the manly love of the hero and the beautiful character of her who from the beginning was cut out for him."

"There is no question of that," said Mina, turning to glance back for no reason. Women do this ever since the time of Lot's unfortunate wife. She did not pause in her thought. "That is the one vital element in Mrs.

Southworth's stories. Her splendid spontaneity, I think, adds to their exceeding great and popular charm."

"There is much in spontaneity, all allow, but not all in that, I take it. Now, Pere Loti just wrote. He seemingly didn't struggle to quote others, lug in his much reading, or interlard his pages with classical names or classical allusions as was the style at no far-off day among the poets, or convey his reader just to the margin of his wide knowledge of facts or psychology, or tell you of his own self importance. To be sure he had or gave careful attention to the aristocracy of his language, of his ideas, of his incidents, though his characters might be of the good humble people."

"And I agree perfectly with you, if you care to know my view. I think the eternality of love the one inexhaustible theme for all novelists for all time. Love is universal, unalterable; language changes." She knew not why she said this. She looked at the golden sunlight upon the green grass, and felt disposed to blush. She thought when he spoke of the "eternality of love" that his idea was absolutely abstract, while in fact it was more concrete than the context implied.

And in his mind he wondered why she made the "eternality of love" so marked. Was it the microbe of love disturbing the even tenor of his thoughts and riling the springs of his emotions as the angel troubled the water of the pool of Bethesda, or was it simply "a theory and not a condition that confronted him." He was in doubt, and doubt is heresy in all cases relating to the beautiful, refined, elevating emotions of love. Doubt! Her smile might be an *avant coureur* of splendid heart loneliness,

and again it might be an ebullition of her instinctive loveliness and sweetness, and yet again it might be her great good sense that lifted away the shadowy and darted a ray into the mystic world of love and life.

Rumor had borne it to his ears, and it was no pleasant news to him of course, that Mina Wadsworth was engaged to wed a "Lord" of some kind; and since the feminine season was on at the watering places he wondered why the "Lord" was not in evidence, contributing to their mutual pleasure. She seems, he was led timidly, tentatively to conceive, to be not much concerned about him, for she never alludes to him. He could not conceive, however, that conscious silence implies perfect understanding. His reflections were not sumptuous. Out of a mutinous idea, a thought in rebellion against the uncertainty of her relations to the "Lord," a resolution was born to know from her own lips his standing in her estimation. "Estimation" was his word. He still thought of her in intellectual terms rather than emotional. Of course the rumor of her probable marriage to the "Earl" was whispered only in the exclusive clubs, the fashionable boudoirs, and the embassies in Washington city, but at her summer home in Walpole gossip was quite busy with the rumor. Putting aside the intrepidity of his thought, as it might seem to her and as it did seem to him, he nevertheless decided to know her mind and heart then and there.

"I should think," he began, "that the proposals and love scenes in your book were transcripts of your own experience,—they had the essence of reality in them."

"Of course one never writes what one don't know,—

can't," she replied archly. The response seemed to block his game.

"Were you able to tinge the reality with a little of the paint of imagination, or did your pen picture fall short of the facts?"

"I can say as to my own impression that the pen picture does not parallel the reality."

"I have no experimental knowledge of love," said he. It was a serious statement, and might be construed quite uncomplimentary of him.

"Indeed," smiled Mina.

"Truly." But his look denied his assertion. He resumed. "I was saying that I believe that love, and the smile, the kiss, the clock, the bell, the sun, the wind, the noise, the horse, human emotions, human motion, and many other things, speak the same language everywhere,—a sort of Esperanto. And love is more universal in mimetic speech than any other human emotion, and is perhaps as expressive as anger."

"Love sent anywhere C. O. D. would no doubt be promptly paid for,—redeemed." A logical dalliance gleamed from her eyes in an arch manner that would have suggested something to anybody but the love-stupid Professor; a halo of anticipation was in her half-parted lips; a faint shadow of Griselda seriousness upon her brow; and a speculative dilemma nested in the corners of her dimpled cheek. The Professor, a splendid-hearted man, was in the murky semblance of a nightmare dream, and could not see anything—nothing! He stupidly mistrusted that broker of promises, Sir Cupid Love, and he feared,—feared what! Her last words had the joyous thrill of se-

crecy about them,—like a first loveletter, or a private confidential note of first love in the first diary. And still he refused to read. It was an affair not all his own, and his sense of respect for the heart secret of another forbade his peeping over the shoulder. But the truth is, he was a dull pupil in the school of love, and was not skilled enough to run as he read. It was a painful delight.

Did love, real love, Mina had often wondered, ever take a new tack? Its methods vary with each one, but the emotions of love are the same since the days when Adam told Eve he loved her. No one knows in what language Adam conveyed his frenzied love! And what is love, anyway? A definition will give us no clear understanding, because it is wholly an emotional matter, not intellectual. Love is simply the emotional element of selection.

"I presume love sent C. O. D. would be promptly met and received," said he.

"Except by defective, delinquent, dependent lovers," she amended. She could not defend herself in this bold dalliance and frank banter with him, and did it out of pure mischief (do you believe it?) rather than—what?

What seemed to others to be an idle stroll upon the shaly beach was in truth a farcical love affair, in which a love dummy would not see, think, hear, or feel. She was disposed to reprobate herself very seriously for her indefensible liberty in conversation with him, nor was she inclined to excuse her rather leading talk. She had never been guilty of the like before in her very proper life. For one moment she thought she felt miserable about this abandoned talk, as the word was at the moment in her mind, and possessed of depressing fear and shame she dragged

her shoe-toe heavily in the gravel for one single step. Then the self-condemnation had passed.

In every life there are inconsistencies; and there should be, under the divine law of opposites. Mina knew this as well as the professor, but the knowledge did not grant unwarranted privileges on that account. The restraint was still a veil upon their hearts.

He looked around with an expression beseeching help; all his thoughts seemed to be as commonplace as sin; yet every idea, however rough and unhewn, lay sure and true in his heart. His weakness was, he had to browbeat himself into doing some things. He allowed he was scarcely like other men. His thoughts!—nothing comes being so nearly nothing as a thought. How evanescent! How perishable! How easily forgotten and lost forever! And when forgotten or lost, what reality has departed from us? Anything? Nothing! And is love, for which all the world moves,—is love a whimsical thought, or a mere flimsy and evanescent emotion! He was not in a mood to question or defend anything. Love is contagious from the eyes. Love is a dream. Love is rhythmic reality. Love is a sham. Love is a nothing. Love is everything. Love is the basis of the universe. Love is divine. Love is a blessing. Love is a curse. Love is a vague delusion. Love smiles. Love ennobles. Love leads to heaven. Of course.

“Is love a banter?” he asked after a conscienceless pause and dreary silence, when nothing was heard but their footsteps and the waves and the wind,—all hollow mockeries then.

“No indeed,” she quickly answered.

“Are you ever serious in love matters?”

"Never so much so in my life as then."

It seemed he was at last "worked up to the point." She caught his spirit motion. To be sure, then, she was not prepared to intercept his declaration, she impulsively, trembling confessed to herself. He was a "fine young man," without a flaw physically, mentally, emotionally. She became unreasonably alarmed. She looked flurriedly around as if seeking some hole of exit. It depressed her that she had precipitated upon herself what she so richly deserved. The Earl took no part in her commotion, but she was not in a mood to give herself body and soul to this noble man. She was; she wasn't. What would she do! To accept him for a life partner—not to-day, whatever she might do to-morrow. She had been dallying along with a fancy that was no more than a will-o'-the-wisp, and now she was lost in the marsh in the inky darkness alone. She had, it seemed, tempted the timid man up to the point of a proposal—worried him into it. Now she was not ready to abide by her own folly, committed with wide-open eyes in broad daylight in the twentieth century. Why, what sort of creature was she?

Suddenly some one called to her from an oriole window all bedecked with beautiful flowers and rich laces on the inside. It came like an angel's voice from heaven to a lonely, distressed soul. And then she frowned. Why did the voice interrupt so sweet and unusual situation! How closely heaven lies to hades!

"Miss Wadsworth! Miss Wadsworth!"

And down the steps rushed Miss I. Single, tripping spiritedly as a school girl, smiling gayly in animated greeting. It was an astonishment to the two self-absorbed

lovers, and she tumbled down upon them like a swift meteor from the sky. Welcome!—not welcome! Glad to see you!—avaunt!

“O, you two look like veteran lovers,” she shrilled out, “joshing” them on their serenity.

“And is that criminal?” he smiled in undaunted answer.

“You really make my cheeks feel rosy red,” Mina ob-jurgated in half interrogatory fashion.

“Telltale blushes,” said Miss I. Single.

“Not all blushes are confessions,” said Mina.

At that moment Clever Hesperus and Peter Wilkins, an old ex-lover of Mina and still her admirer at long range and her friend at all hazards, approached them from the front. Both bowed, but Peter gave his a comedian air of probity and seriousness. Then he said, a grin as ample as Oscar Wilde’s sunflower view of esthetics decorating his meagre physiognomy:

“Smile,—and smile,—and still smile. That’s all I have to do now in my old age. (He was but twenty-five). Simply be happy,—but be happy. I believe in the theory and the fact of smiling.” Peter was a reputed humorist, and withal a fine fellow.

“I have a desire to say,” said Clever Hesperus in a painfully exact manner, lifting his thin, pale hand to his round brow and drawing a finger across his forehead just beneath his white panama hat in abstract habit, “I repeat, I have a desire to say that the question of happiness is a very large one, and was the chief concern of our first parents in the Garden of Eden.” He looked as if he thought he had said something very smooth, hard, and polished.

The walk was continued, and the conversation was directed to no one in particular nor limited to any special line of thought. It was fragmentary, straggling, inconsequent. It is needless to repeat the harmless chaffer that flowed with bubbles and gurgles like champagne. Nothing could be glum or shadowy where Peter Wilkin's vegetated. Mr. Exact was an entity of cold, cold intellect, entirely without personal feeling, and, practically impervious to offense, he construed no condition into comedy. Miss I. Single did not hesitate to gurgle,—“it was so funny, this idea of happiness.”

“Men are ever building higher moral as well as mental Babels or skyscrapers to ascend to the skies of happiness,” said Prof. P. Thomas Nelson, altering his subject more readily than his broken-into emotions, “but I believe they mistake. It occurs to me now that much of the ideal of the day, the theory being that the ideal is the goal of happiness, is unideal—refined beyond the normal,—a mistaken ideal. The natural is the ideal.”

“Happiness and misery are co-ordinate,” said Peter Wilkins, the gravity of his look exceeding the limits of decorum, “especially when a delicate, delicious morsel you are lifting to a watering palate misses its destination and falls to the ground. You catch the drift of my argument, I hope. It is very significant that you do. Otherwise it might affect my *mens sana in corpore sano*.”

There was a laugh. Then Mina said, trenching dangerously near psychology:

“Most people provoke themselves to anger, or make the conditions that do provoke them.”

“Men are laying the flattering unction to their souls that

they are rescuing the subject of heredity from oblivion.” said the Professor, “but they are simply dangles upon the shore of truth, while the great undiscovered infinite ocean lies before them. The study of the day is the association of intellects, the association of hearts, the association of persons, the association of fortunes, the association of business, the association of purpose, and their results, and the conviction seems to be that kismet seals everything.”

“I’m sure that Miss Wadsworth’s *no* was kismet to me.” said Peter Wilkins, blinking his eyes as if he had been hit on the head.

“You naughty spendthrift with your tongue,” shouted Mina, shying a frolicsome look at him.

“An open confession—”

“Permit me to say in all candor and with all the precision I can, that if Miss Wadsworth said *no* to you, she meant it in dead earnest,” and Mr. Exact simply turned to Mina as if he had paid her an exquisite compliment. He was radiant.

“I’m at sea without a rudder,” said Miss I. Single. The Professor concluded his thought in these words:

“We all are. Now, opportunity is given to every one by environment, but environment doesn’t give brain faculties. Every one has two sets of faculties, opposites to be sure, and environment but develops or exercises the one or the other, as the case may be, and that is all. Environment can not recreate, or remodle, or alter the natural gifts or qualities, or destroy bad impulses, or remove defects or taints, or add new essences of nature and in so far make another and a new being,—it doesn’t change the being. It may give the chance to develop the one and keep

the other in abeyance. What every one is, is registered in eternity; what one does is recorded on his memory. It is not a new idea to have registered human stock."

"Now, I perfectly and absolutely agree with the professor, though I know nothing about it," said the good-humored Peter Wilkins blandly. Miss I. Single shrieked at him, and cried aloud:

"My views to a dot."

"If I be not impertinent, I beg to say that if I had given the matter as much profound and zealous study as the Professor, I would no doubt entertain the same views." And Clever Hesperus was under the impression he smiled, though nobody thought he did.

Just here ex-Senator Merrill Wadsworth swept along in his auto-car, and Mina and Miss I. Single bounded in and whirled away. The men sauntered down to the beach, and felt dull, with something taken out of the joy of the day.

CHAPTER IX

MITH Gulliver, the friend and familiar of Nero Pensive, proceeded straight to New York to give what information he had obtained feloniously about Clarissa Harlow and Mina Wadsworth. It was wages to him, not service or honor.

Nero was chafing because the two girls were together, and his infamous mood was dominating him. If he could but locate Dean McBarron, he would feel less intensely the acuteness of the situation. The Mr. Hyde of his nature was demonstrative, vulgar, profane, coarse; and uppermost now, the Dr. Jekyll within being in mean and utter subjection.

The man was a veritable Mephistopheles, a Cronos, suppressing the divine Adam, the Ish of the Hebrew Scriptures, in him. In every one, to be sure, there is a Faust and a Christ, a Nero and a Hezekiah, a sinner and a saint, a devil and an angel, a Socrates and a Casper Hauser.

Nero Pensive had permitted the evil to dominate his life, and upon occasion he became a raving madman. Common sense was a charlatan, a monkey; a device of evil, when passion tore him to tatters.

So he received Mith Gulliver, on the occasion of his recall from Atlantic City, with execrations and furious fulminations, a foolish storm of reproach. No half sane man, even, likes to be the recipient of such abusive tongue es-

capades. They have no place in the better and higher order of things.

Mith arose and stood at the door. For one thing, allow it to be said, whatever Mith lacked by nature, he did not lack the excellent gift of physical courage.

"Here! Here! Here! Cut this all out," he roared above Nero's bellowings, his brows fairly joining in knit line over his eyes, a hand against the door-facing, and bracing himself.

"Blank, blank your measley mustard soul! Why are you alive! Why didn't you separate them!" He demanded, unreasonably asking the impossible.

"I never make mistakes, I want to tell you," said Mith placatingly, "and if you will believe me or not I strove and worked and did everything with all my might and strength to bring the separation about, and would have done it if you had not called me back here. Here I am, and I could not do it, and so it is."

"Your a blank dirty liar!"

"You're another."

"I'll not take that, you he devil."

"O, yes you will."

Nero rushed toward Mith with angry face and clenched fists, furiously bent on striking. But something in Mith's eye put wisdom in Nero's petty head, and he argued himself into a belief that it was best for him to keep his head out of the tiger's mouth. He paused, turned back, waved his hand, turned to Mith, and said:

"O, Mith, what a fool I am. I am beside myself, because I can't have my way at every turn in life."

"I know. I'm next to you. When it comes to me,

Nero, you've never got your nerve with you to do violence to yourself by using me as the instrument of self-infliction."

"Glad you see and excuse my folly."

"I'm too good a friend to you to hurt you—in any way. I say in any way. I know your spells don't last longer than a snowflake in sheol, or a lighted match and powder, or a woman's love for her husband."

"Your're smarter than I am, Mith; a blank sight. Do the girls associate much together?"

"Yes, considerable, more or less."

"Let it go that way. Let them alone."

"As you say."

"But I now want to know where Dean McBarron, your George Washington is. Tell me that, and I will forgive you this present row between us."

"I—I—I'm very correct, you know, and would give you no false information, you know, but really at this moment I don't know where he's hiding, hiding successfully. But I will soon know, I say. You know Clarissa Harlow was lost but a moment. My keen scent found her as soon as I set out after her, you know. They can't get away from me, I say."

"I'm not stuck with the idea of raking up the scraps of humanity from the hedges and byways, from the poorhouses and jails to associate with and dwell with on equal terms; but when they come into your life, nolens volens, what will a body do." It was easy to see the drift of his observation.

"Like people guilty of treason, make the most of it," returned Mith, not seeing the application of his utterance.

"Ah, you're exceeding smart, Mith, to make such keen, happy remarks—exceeding smart; and I'm a fool, it goes without demonstration. You are an expert in advising the correct thing, you see, and one is bound to respect it, or go counter to it, one or the other." It was the spirit still of the grinning, unconquered Mr. Hyde deceived into obedience.

"I'm no fool!"

"O, well, now don't abuse yourself by getting angry about a matter, in which you can't justify yourself—no reason for your anger. Come, sit down—sit down. You really deserve the best that cheers the soul and stirs up dormant, or flunking, happiness."

"I'll go you."

"I'm your friend, Mith. Pray pay no attention to my tantrums; they're the rage of a moment, and gone. You know this. I need you. You have a face strong, serious, common, with an every-day look, nothing attractive beyond ordinary, nothing sweet above the level, but a common-sense, plain, true face; vigorous, not manly, not coarse, not grave, not farcical, not fitful, serious, attractive for its shining lustre or model shape, but for what one don't see there but knows is behind it—a great spy. I need you, Mith. You are my mascot. Find me Dean McBarron, and your reputation and fortune will be made. Hear me?"

"Sure."

Nero Pensive, as every one knew, was a man perfectly willing to quarrel with his best friend, if the impulse commanded and controlled him, and never reckon with consequences till they came. Living an imperfect, unsound,

incomplete life, his memory had a very large and complete stock of regrets. Never contented, all things exhausted at thirty, the end had really come before nature had ordered it. Having lived up all the divine gifts, he was qualified for nothing becoming a full man.

"Find him, Mith," he said, after they had hobnobbed together and reiterated in small detail all the news Mith bore from Atlantic City.

"A wink's as good as a nod to a blind horse."

Nero Pensive sat long in doubtful meditation, bitter indecision, and chafed and ranted at the fates,—that his exchequer was low, and that conditions intervened to checkmate his "making a raise" before it should be too late.

Foul-minded man!

CHAPTER X

THE men were discussing the new arrivals from New York, and wondering why they should come to Atlantic City. Then they went to the golf links, and were thoroughly enlivened, even resurrected from the death and the grave of inaction. The play made life for the day seem worth while. They had thoroughly fumigated their blood, for "the blood is the life," with oxygen, and the subtile ozone broadened their minds and tempers throughout the day.

Miss Olive Pendell had come, and Mina at once met her. The meeting was not perfunctory, was not as the limited pen of a ready press reporter would say "a joyous one," but it was one that exhumed the girlish past buried at Vassar some time ago, and now they reread the old records in the memory, in which were many laughable college escapades. Some things they recalled were screamingly farcical, and their pleasure together was real.

Olive told her dear friend Mina, with no easy heart, with no tearless eye, her heart story. It was crushing, a blacking of the whole firmament, to discover that Lawrence Dunston had deceived her as to his drink habits. It taxed her resolution to the extreme limit to have to "pass him up" and tear him altogether out of her life. She was bruised, sore, wounded, and there could be no Good Samaritan to step in and comfort and care for

her. She must tread the winepress alone, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." But she could not spoil her own life, and his too, by marrying him. He did not respect his promise, nor his word, nor love her fondly and truly enough to look not on the wine when it is red.

She and Mina were in the cottage leased for the season by the Pendells, sitting in the bow-window, and the breeze from the sea fluttered the curtains and the palms. The effect of it all was subtle joy, a permeating influence that had an uplift in it, a token of what heaven perhaps will be. Without announcement, as if emerging from the air, springing out from nothing as it were, quite to their surprise Miss I. Single cried in front of the window:

"O, girls, come out. Or shall I come in? It is life-giving to be in the sun. I believe in sun, much sun, too much sun."

"Come-in—come-in," Miss Olive Pendell bade, running to the door to welcome her. They had met, when Olive first arrived. It seemed to be but a chance, passing acquaintance, such as takes place at all public resorts.

Neither Mina nor Olive had a final opinion of the girl, who seemed to be unchaperoned, except by a man, who in no way seemed her equal. She might be truly divine, and she might be a Camille or a Nana. Notwithstanding, she deported herself with the very best self-concern and circumspection.

Miss I. Single fairly flew in, on invitation, and her

vivacity seemed proper and irrepressible. They all came out and occupied the vine-shady veranda.

"I was simply drifting to the tennis court," said Miss I. Single, presenting a smile that not only showed perfect teeth but an unruffled temper, "when I stumbled on you here," nodding toward them.

There was something supremely charming and marvelously beautiful and attractive about the gay, giddy girl that won all people to her. But she seemed to lack the stability of character that makes noble wives, superfine mothers, and model home-keepers. She, in a word, was defective in that positive goodness that characterizes great domestic femininity. She was liable to say things that might border on the femininely heretical.

"Going to the tennis court," exclaimed the two girls in a breath.

"Did I say tennis court? Perhaps I was going after the men, if I should honestly confess, before my God, the motive in my soul that God himself had a hand in creating."

This was shocking. But she added in an unforced spirit of seriousness:

"I was simple minded once. Had not lived long and had not learned the art of evading impertinent questions with impertinent lies. This is a heartless confession, I know, and is not an accusation against you two supremely morally normal girls. No, no, not an accusation."

And here the matter was dropped.

"You are so superbly gowned," said Olive.

"I dress for men only. All do it."

"I have no desire to outdress others," said Mina, disregarding Miss I. Single's observation.

"I do," said Miss I. Single without the tone of controversy. "The frou-frou of a Paris gown is angelic music to my soul. In the height of the season not to be in the mode, or in the swim, is simply to be in an Adamless heaven."

"It takes money to dress," said Olive oracularly.

"Mrs. Burke-Roche-Batonyi complained bitterly that eighty thousand a year was too little for the proper garbing of her aristocratic form," said Mina. "She could not dress on so pinched an allowance."

"Miss Giulia Morosini spent a hundred thousand dollars a year on her clothes, and that would buy only a hundred dresses at a thousand dollars apiece," said Miss I. Single.

"Some nighties are most bewitching lingerie," said Olive, "and cost two thousand dollars and more. They are hand-woven linen batiste, of indescribable sheerness and flawless. These robes de nuit are trimmed in Brussels lace and are hand embroidered with vine of roses and leaves, and herein lies their splendor."

"The trousseau of the Archduchess Maria Henriette consisted of wedding, reception, honeymoon, automobile, driving, riding, dinner and restaurant, ball, and opera costumes, French models, and the women fairly broke their necks to see it when it was put on exhibit," said Mina.

"The picturesque directoire idea, with a double row of buttons, going with a high collar, is on the road to popularity," said Miss I. Single. It's daring—that's it. An

embroidered lining in distracting fanciful figures underneath the full-length slit. This costume of old rose silk, or white satin, striped perpendicularly with black, would be fetching. In fact the sheath gown is *de requeur* and is chic."

"I like an old-world blue Roman satin,—a match for my eyes," said Olive. "I would want little trimming, save a band of embroidery jeweled with sapphires, and fastened at the side with a buckle inlaid with blue stones,—something not purely decorative yet sweet and clinging."

"Very thin silk stockings, extraordinarily rich, laced, embroidered, so that when a wind flutters the soft unlined skirts which are cunningly weighted at the hems, the richness of the hosiery will be seen as well as the pretty, neat, little shoe," said Miss I. Single. "A corsage or white waist with openwork or peekaboo effect, and a merry-widow hat so large that no man at a theatre can see for the cordon or cheval-de-frise of hats in front of him. Wonderful woman; poor little man!"

"And what is it all for?" asked Mina.

"Marriage, of course," said Miss I. Single, staring lugubriously at Mina. She was thinking of her and Nero Pensive. "Fine dresses, you see, render the Fort Dodge, Iowa, 'must marry ordinance' entirely needless. Girls will marry, and what is the use to disguise any of their methods for entrapping a man."

"O, you horrid thing of such unrobed ideas, undisguised by mild terms or sugar-coat covering," cried Mina in mixed metaphor adding a laugh that was not all real levity,—possessing a shadow of reproof in it. "How

lightly, my dear girl, you view the matrimonial venture." And she opened her fan in a way that seconded her sentiment.

"I think most domestic troubles originate in want of thought," said Olive, whose mind and heart were sore yet from her recent bitter experience.

"Few women have the tact to handle a husband as they should," looking soberly out upon the beach.

"Shan't I tell you girls that you know nothing about husbands, or once in the noose what sort of tact will win out," said Miss I. Single in a lilting tone that seemed to have a yawn in it. The two girls looked instantly across the line of view of the other, and then as if concealing an obtruding thought looked away. Mina's brown eyes took on a flash of keener intensity that was not suspicion but wonder, was not accusation but charity, was not judgement but kindness. "No, girls, I'm confessing nothing," complacently added Miss I. Single, but she did not lift her serious eyes from the obtruding toe-point of her enameled Sorosis. The added remark dispelled the opportunity for suspicion. "I simply state what I have observed, and what you will doubtless experience some day."

"Of course," said Mina, "unnatural marriage combinations can't be right. Nothing can make them right. And they can never be happy—such unions."

"And mental combinations may be unfortunate, a bad mixture of disagreeing emotions, and the results are but natural, to be sure," supplemented Olive.

"The tendency of the day is to frivolity, and away from seriousness, in most things, and particularly so in

love affairs," said Mina reflectively, at the same time half confessing by sober glance that she had not been wholly guiltless herself. In a restless moment she walked up and down the veranda, and then sat down again upon the veranda chair. Miss I. Single looked up, self-accused. Olive looked her approval of the sage remark, and then added as corroborative:

"Love affairs now-a-days seem not to be serious, as you say, Mina, and mismated affection soon develops into a poisoned affection, in more senses than that of mere indefinite sentiment."

"Who's to blame for all this?" asked Miss I. Single, as if she had more experience than she cared to confide then to a cold and cruel world. Mina observed with cunning eye the self-conviction that suffused for one brief instant like a flash the face of Miss I. Single. It resembled a flash of painful memory.

"For one thing, lax divorce laws," said Olive.

"For another, parentage," said Mina.

"For another the home, training, and mode of life," said Miss I. Single, drawing upon her own store of experience for the conclusion.

"Love derelicts," added Olive.

"A happy life seems to be altogether in the favor of the gingham-gowned girl," said Mina, arching her brows without felonious intent and making that unqualified classification of facts that is the license of conversation.

"But let me tell you, girls,—every girl is like a fine peach in the market that sells entirely on its good looks, since it can't be sampled without ruin, and sells not on its real quality. And you know the fine, large-looking

peaches are not very sweet. But it is a generally accepted proposition that the exterior of anything argues the quality of the nature of the interior. Most people have no other opportunity of judging of the interior but by the exterior. All girls know this fact, and hence they fix up, look sweet, and put the best foot foremost." Miss I. Single did not spare herself in this trenchant criticism. She concluded: "But you well know, girls, that the way the skin and the flesh shape up over the bony anatomy is not the way the soul, the real thing, is fashioned."

"Beauty is only skin deep, in other words," said Olive, having a lively impression of the hoary age of the adage.

"Matrimony becomes discouraging, to say the very least, to the uninitiated," said Mina, "when they behold so many wives who have become good remonstrators and have made marriage a failure."

"Who'd have thought it! Even Queen Alexandra has dwindled into a family brawler; and others beside her make a purgatory of home," said Miss I. Single seriously.

"I should think, in view of this awful fact, that no man would wish to marry. He takes a very great risk," said Olive candidly.

"O, girls, let's cut out this foolish, insane talk," laughed Miss I. Single. "None of us will know anything sure about it,—all speculation now,—till we have had the Gordian knot tied. Speculation decides nothing."

"You seem to think," interposed Mina, "that the old adage is true, that when a man marries his troubles begin. Mrs. Newlywed doesn't think so, whatever the next-door neighbor may say."

"Yes, yes, girls," broke in Miss I. Single, "it is a

national evil,—I speak soberly when I say national evil,—that there are so many unkissed wives and unkissed husbands. Daughters, girls, sisters, sweethearts manage to be kissed too much too soon. Going to divorce courts is like asking for another chance to get away from the evil of marriage, much as the boy asked for another chance after he had applied a lighted match to the powderhorn. A second opportunity will bring about much the same result as did the first. Adam and Eve, you know, had trouble from the start. Trouble is a natural element of the human creature,—born with it; kismet.”

“And yet marrying is the most natural thing in the world—and the greatest,” said Mina. Miss I. Single thought of Nero Pensive again.

“An unmarried girl is a mismated creature,” said Miss I. Single.

“Of two evils choose the less,” said Olive.

There was a hiatus in the talk. Some auto swirled by, and disappeared in a swirl of dust down the avenue, and the girls paused in the desired undesirable talk. The dust lingered and slowly diffused itself in the air.

Miss I. Single knew one man in the horseless rig. It was Mith Gulliver. So soon! His journey to Philadelphia had not been delayed. Miss I. Single wondered. This unexpected, speedy return probably meant important news.

She soon bade the girls good-bye, and passed away on lilting toe, casting back a golden smile, and a cheery, careless twitter in her voice.

“There’s something dreamily mysterious in that giddy-brained girl’s life, over which she seems to cast a veil

by a seeming absolute freedom from care," said Mina, as she and Olive went into the flower-flecked many-hued lawn.

"Is her gayety put on?" asked Olive in considerable surprise.

"She compels me to love her, and yet I have uncertain feelings in her presence. I have but just met her here—in the last day or two."

"She has singular views," said Olive.

CHAPTER XI

“**I**’VE come quickly to tell you that Nero Pensive has disappeared, and that I don’t know where. He’s not in Philadelphia,” said Mith Gulliver, standing close to Clarissa Harlow under the shade of a large tree on the lawn, and striving to have the important air of a director general of some surveillance department,—something grander than that of a spy, or a detective, or the common work of a Sherlock Holmes put on the scent of a Raffles or an Orchard.

“Disappeared!” in agitated surprise. “Mysteriously disappeared! Have you an idea where?” speaking rapidly.

“Where!—I never fail you, I never miss fire, I’m always your slave, Miss Harlow, and I beg, I say beg, to assure you that if he is not dead and in the grave I’ll find him for you, never mind. Sure! Don’t worry.”

She was silent a moment. A desperate occasion demands strenuous measures. She came, in the first instance, to Atlantic City, expecting to fall upon Nero Pensive; for Mith had told her this titled “Lord” would be there to meet Miss Wadsworth. He had not materialized himself there. Perhaps he had found another pretty face somewhere, which he was flattering and misleading. But he must be dug up at all hazards. It was no secret to her that he was evading her.

However, her coming to Atlantic City had brought her gain in the game,—a point she had not anticipated.

It put her decidedly in the lead in the contest. She answered Mith:

"Find him for me at once."

"I say, indeed I will,—sooner than you or I think. I'll unearth him somewhere, if I have to dig over every foot of earth to find his grave,—if he is in it; and he should be." He whispered, looking about as if his greatest dread on earth was ears,—human ears. But it was all for effect.

"If you don't find him, somebody will, or *I* will," she said very positively, her round pearl eyes fairly dancing in flashing animation.

"Never you weep, Miss Harlow,—I beg pardon, Miss I. Single,—I'll report him to you in a few days. I've given the police of several cities the tip (the cold-blooded liar!) and I know we will find him soon. Meanwhile, my headquarters are here in Atlantic City, where I can take orders from you direct and report the latest things found out, you see." He furtively glanced at the unsuspecting, trustful young girl.

"If you don't find him," approaching near and tapping his lapel with her finger nails, "I say, if you don't find him,"—a pause,—"you'd better." She frowned.

"I'm no boaster, as you very well know, and I am a man of very few words, as I like to be, but I'm a man of quick action, as I have proved to you in more cases than one; but I'm here to tell you I'll find him in no time at all,—find him, at all."

"That is all I ask."

As if suddenly taken with a new idea,—though he had well planned just how he would do it, he broke out in a way meant to leave her to infer that something,—

perhaps much,—might hinge on this particular matter:

“Where is Dean McBarron,—I wonder?” Her surreptitious glance had a design in it. She half surmised he was pumping her. If so, what could it mean?

“Ah, you have asked me—”

“I heard Nero Pensive say, last time I was with him, that he thought McBarron is in England,—I say in England.”

“Yes; I don’t—”

“No, I don’t either.”

“He—”

“Nero said he suddenly picked up and went back to England.” The liar!

“I—” Miss I. Single knew him to be in a Chicago hospital. And she was going to keep him there, and let Mith do some little rummaging among the human agglomerations to find him.

It was at this moment that that dread man, Clever Hesperus, appeared in all his fullness and passivity. He was walking toward them, a hand behind him, as if he had ordered it to bring up the rear, his tall, slender frame assuming a gait like the peripatetics, a step so measured and prim as to suggest a soul within chained and galled and crushed by method, the highest form of rarefied torture. He bowed and lifted his panama to Miss I. Single, and then greeted Mith Gulliver, alias Mr. Mikado. He begged pardon for intruding.

“But what fallible man is immune against the deadly contagion of beauty,” he smiled at the young girl, his smile having the defect of no warmth,—a thin, dyspeptic, exact, cross seam, or horizontal crease in his face. A swift mental comment she made to the effect that Mr.

Exact was a melodrama written in tragedy and with strong lights and fierce music. She smiled. The smile of a woman is not always what it appears to be on the surface. There was an uninterpretable tinge of shadow as a background of the wily smile.

"Do you say that, expecting me to forget my troubles and listen to yours? But what do I say,—you have no troubles."

She pointed to a rustic seat nearby, under the sheltering arms of a stately tree, whence Mith was already directing his steps. Without a word she followed him, and Clever followed her. They sat upon the rustic bench. Clever looked up among the leaves, fluttering with undisguised joy in the gentle wind. For the first time she caught a feint of love in his dome of thought, not in his heart, and she felt that his destiny was in her power. He had no heart, though he was impressed to the contrary. She imagined he had a look of love guiltiness; as if he had been thinking unauthorized thoughts and dreaming impossible dreams about her. She did not object. Every captured man was a subtle flattery. It all went in life, and helped to relieve the intolerable monotony.

"My troubles are few and far between like angels' visits, and this is due, I may say without the slightest exaggeration, to an attitude of mind," he said gravely, as did Anthony in his funeral oration over the dead body of Cæsar, the fresh victim of Brutus' dagger.

"You are a great artist in the skillful use of words," she observed, while an aside to herself declared this was another watering-place episode. She would develop the lead and see what was in it.

"You,—mind you, I'm not in an accusative, or nominative, or vocative state of mind and heart,—you, I say, indulge the poetic faculty of imagination, it seems to me, without let or hinderance," he remarked a little tentatively.

"I have a graveyard in my rear yard, with not a gravestone in it, where I have buried some, or most, of my best admired and dearest pet lies, and where I hope they will lie unidentified till doomsday, or the day after."

"My friend, Professor Nelson, said he had a garden full of thriving, well-cultivated lies and they were in profusive colors and of perfect form. Perhaps he would rent you a nosegay of them." This was the highest flight of imagination he had ever indulged. Love is ever a stimulus of the fancy.

"No. They are useless at a summer watering-resort; and moreover I should dislike to wear them in the presence of my friends, and especially before you." She smiled bewitchingly.

"I never had a genuine, careful, near, dear friend", said he. The reason was not with the friends but with him, to be sure.

Mith had been mum up to this moment, but he now broke in:

"I never had but one, and she died."

"Your love—fatal?" she asked, and Mr. Exact Clever Hesperus looked at him, a similar inquiry in his eyes. Then he added:

"Girls should take warning and avoid the poison of your love."

"No man is to be trusted," said Mith, "who don't make a fool of himself once in a while over a lovely woman."

"In other words I might utter your idea, viewed from a different angle, and say,—No life but what is interesting and romantic to the one living it," said Clever Hesperus.

"I have no doubt that is entirely true," said Mith quite unconscious of his solemnity and undisguised honesty of idea, and of his curtness which was as pronounced as that of a country doctor.

"It is not to be doubted," said Clever Hesperus in eloquent decisiveness.

"Truth is ever true—right or wrong," said Mith. His power of logic did not strike attitudes, or reach altitudes, or puzzle the keenest brains by its obscurities.

"I should think Mr. Clever Hesperus has lost a sweetheart somewhere along the rugged pathway of life, and that he is no longer without an ever-present disturbing memory," remarked Miss I. Single, bringing herself under the rigid laws of love diplomacy.

"No-o-o. That is to say, if I may say it, that she did not die, nor did I ever confess to her that I loved her; but she married another man."

"That was romantic. I trust you have never been so cold-blooded as Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen was. He spent a summer at a watering-place, and flirted with a young lady, and at the end of the flirtation he coolly lifted his hat, said good-bye, and added that she had been worth five hundred dollars to him," said Miss I. Single.

"How was that?" Mr. Exact asked naively.

"He embroidered the flirtation in a story that he sold to a magazine for five hundred dollars.

"Gad! The idea is a suggestion. A friend of mine

was once writing a story, and to gain information first-handed for his greatest love scene he made love to a beautiful girl."

"With what result?" she asked.

"They married in six months."

"Good," cried she. Her smile was winning. Mith said it was "fetching." Among men his depiction of her smile was not always as elegant even as this. Clever Hesperus built great skyscraping "air domes" out of it, and assumed that he was gaining in her favor. Otherwise she was under no obligation to give him the best out of her repertoire of bewitching smiles. Evidently she had an assortment of them. It flatters a common man to be admired by a lovely woman. The smile stirred the almost impossible or dried-up emotions of the man, defective in that greatest and most perfect of all God's gifts, emotion.

It is impossible to fathom her reasons for tolling on this poor moth. She had a reason at the moment she thought. To-morrow she might repudiate it. But it answered her purpose to-day.

As Mith Gulliver, the friend to no one, arose to leave, he presented the flimsy excuse of pressing business. The real reason was that he did not want to listen to the subtle love-making to her by another man. Still it should be nothing to him, for he was nothing to her.

Her flirtation with Clever Hesperus for the nonce was closed. She apologized for leaving, stating she had a "previous engagement." He believed her. And he helped her frame the apology to him. He would not have her violate a "date on his account for anything."

CHAPTER XII

“**P**ROFESSOR Nelson, I am yet in politics, in a way, as you well know. A man once in politics very deep seldom is able to escape from the foul marsh and the miasma and ignes-fatui, and it is quite possible that you may be chosen with others to go to Europe on a business of special investigation for the government.”

“Would it affect my present position in the university, Mr. Wadsworth?”

“Not in the least. Of course I will see to that,” said ex-Senator Merrill Wadsworth confidently. They were standing in the spacious office of the best hotel in Atlantic City, mingling the smoke of their Favorosas in blue waves just above them, and idling away an hour in the manner of the modern approved idea of “rest.”

The irrepressible, good-humored, splendid fellow, Peter Wilkins, sauntered into the corridor, his hat smartly set upon one side, his cigar sticking up like Uncle Joe Cannon’s, and a swell comedian air in his affectedly swaggerish gait. Approaching ex-Senator Wadsworth and Prof. Nelson, he first spoke.

“May I mingle smoke with you gentlemen?” he said in the hard method of one serious unto death, or one so desiccated the spice of his soul had evaporated or levanted to the beyond ahead of him, or his enthusiasm was dead

or dropped off along the way with much other delicious waste stuff or extinct exuvia.

"Throw that stub away and take a fresh one," said Prof. Nelson handing him his cigar case. Peter Wilkins removed his half consumed cigar, looked affectionately at it a moment as if loth to part with it, and then dropped it into the broad countenance of the nearest cuspidor. He chose another from the cigar case, like a timid boy trying to spell his first word orally before a crusty father, lighted it at the red end of the Professor's, and with a profound bow said:

"Thanks."

His elaborateness was the humor of it.

"What news?" asked the ex-Senator.

"I've a mind to withdraw from earth to eternity," said Peter with affected gloom.

"Why?" queried the Professor.

"Because I can't invent as deep and unfathomable quibbles, as clever and perfect as those forged in Erebus (is that right, Professor?) as another fellow I know."

"Who is that?" asked the ex-Senator.

"Clever Hesperus, my law partner, sometimes nicknamed very appropriately Mr. Exact."

"Yes?" queried the Professor.

"He never made a quibble or a quaver in his long, lonely, thirty-one years of his arctic-zone existence," said Peter Wilkins. They had now found seats and had their feet duly propped against the foot rail.

"He is a perfectly harmless fellow, too correct to be human, to be sure, but withal a well-meaning fellow," said the Professor.

"He confidently believes himself one thing, when others see him differently. His ideas are like speaking German to you in French,—a mixture of frost and hard sense drawn out thin as gold foil. Remember I'm a privileged character in all I say, and stand ready to be knocked down at any time." Peter Wilkins closed an eye, as if to exclude half his ideas as both clumsy and worthless.

"I take it," said the Professor, "that he says a thing because it is truth and *ought* to be said; and not simply because his egotism *wants* to say it, right or wrong."

"I think he does not care who I am or what I am," said Peter Wilkins. "Now, that's what *I* think *he* thinks of *me*; but in real fact *what does he* think? I take a man at what he is, not by the position he holds. 'Some mute inglorious Miltons' occupy insignificant places, while incompetents may be preferred to exalted positions over better men."

"Of course," observed the ex-Senator, emptying a mouthful of smoke into the still air, "of course it is very impolite to be insultingly frank, as all men will and must say, and it is equally uncivil and crude to make responses equally impolite. I have too little knowledge of the real Clever Hesperus to speak correctly of him."

"There are people, since we have come to the abstract discussion of character," said the Professor, "who dispute everything they never heard of before. Their idea is, 'I didn't hear it, or see it, and so it isn't true.' As if what they hadn't heard or thought of couldn't have an existence,—must have origin in their minds, or therefore it is not true. This is there shortsighted logic. Their

innate assumption is that they are infinite, and hence there can be no experience or knowledge beyond what originates with them."

"Egotism is the happiest state of all, after all," said the ex-Senator in philosophical declamation. "It is perhaps as little less selfish as any other state of mind. No state of soul but what is self-seeking and selfish, in that it can be no other than itself. But all states of soul are not cunningly self-seeking, regardless of what may befall the other fellow."

"Don't you like the man," said Peter Wilkins, "who looks studiously indifferent, as if he thought you thought he was great,—as if he thought he saw he was impressing you with a sense flattering to him, framing good opinions of himself in your mind and soul center, creating in you a startling wonder about his great self, a 'marvelous proper man?' "

"The world is afflicted with a strange malady of over-indulged selfishness, and the symptoms are greed, creed, commercialism, graft, class consciousness, trade agreements, labor federations, and the like," said ex-Senator Wadsworth solemnly, seriously.

"And Hagues to correct and assimilate the best thought out of all the earth," put in Professor Nelson quickly.

"And unify all men, who are in fact one universal brotherhood, under one and the same God," said Peter Wilkins casting off his comedian mask for a moment and speaking rapidly as a magazine gun.

At this juncture a stranger walked into the corridor and stalked straight up to the clerk's desk without looking to the right or the left. He had

gray hair and gray mustache, bearing the air of a man of experience and acquaintance with the world. His height was about six feet. The keen, small, steady, penetrating, treacherous eye, of a dazzling full gray at times and an uncertain hue of purple at others, was a mark in the gray man's general make-up that suggested caution to the keen analyst and denied his acceptance, on his first word to one, into the private family of one's best friends. Then, too, he had a wide, long nose and low forehead, and rather protruding chin. But his dress was slightly in disorder, as if it had seen serious service. All this Prof P. Thomas Nelson observed quickly with his accustomed habit of careful analysis of persons. The Professor really *knew* more people than there were people who knew him.

"See that guy?" asked Peter Wilkins in a voice toned down to their immediate circle.

"Yes. He's seen about all there is to see in an ordinary life of three score and ten, though I should judge not above thirty," said the Professor observantly.

"A social degenerate, eh?" suggested the ex-Senator.

"Seen about the whole show, eh? And the rest of it is but repetition, eh? Not much in front for him in the future." And Peter Wilkins laid a finger along side his elementary elephantine proboscis.

"A face desolate, not an oasis in it,—a mean face, I should say, a little severely perhaps," said the Professor as he gazed straight at the man he was so carefully dissecting.

"Suppose I should say his face has a mottled, scrambled-

egg appearance," said Peter Wilkins, knocking the ash of his cigar into the spittoon.

"Perhaps," nodded the Professor. After a pause he added: "That fellow feels driven into a corner, and is resisting fate. That man's first impulse now is to resist, fight everything as something inimical to him; flare up, oppose, deny, cry 'I don't know' (even when he does know). His inner, deep-down, mudsill foundation rebels and fights like the tiger, and he will be considerate with no one or at nothing. He is resisting the self-conviction that he is a proper subject of condemning criticism. He has lived up the little good that was before him when he set out at first in life."

"He looks morally seedy,—that's the idea," said Peter Wilkins, in no hurry to enforce his idea upon his hearers.

"Down in the mouth, out at the elbow, and over at the heel," remarked the ex-Senator. He added reflectively: "Most people in this mundane sphere are perfectly willing to *take*, few to *give*,—money, goods, lands, presents, good words, good feelings, help, friendship. According to the law of opposites peace argues war. In these latter days of adulterated religion and amorphous Puritanism and false science, and recreant sociology, the socialistic idea is but a natural growth out of such mental soil; and therefore the socialistic idea, in its last analysis, is nothing but graft. That man is capable of being a real, rabid socialist."

"Now, I'll venture, that booby there now at the clerk's desk, looking around idly on us, is saying inwardly, perhaps while we are discussing him here outwardly, something like this: 'If I wrong any one, or rather unwit-

tingly offend a friend, I take every means to placate it, instead of every means to aggravate and fan and perpetuate it.' This is my opinion of him, good for this minute only mind you, here and now publicly expressed."

"Don't be too softly innocent about that chap, Peter Wilkins," said ex-Senator Wadsworth, turning an eye edgeways on Peter. "That man—look and see for yourself—has a hard head, a very hard head."

"A perfectly useless factor in society," assented Peter Wilkins. This started the Professor in a line of thought.

"The economic view of vice," said the Professor intensifying the appearance of thought in his brow, "the economic view of vice is that the law of heredity and environment confirm the criminal. But to go on a little. Suppose some one snubs me, intending to hurt me; the injury, it is plain, is not to me if I disregard the snub, but it is to the snubber, who must have a certain state of mind and heart to do such a deed. If he snubs me that doesn't give me his state of feeling, but it does intensify his own evil feeling. And more, such an act is the mark of a spirit born poor in noble qualities. Evil talk about me doesn't reveal *me*, nor does our talk reveal this man; it may be true and it may not be true; but our talk about *him* possesses a certain element of revelation about ourselves; and it is indisputable evidence about us. Our talk is *our* act, not his."

"I wonder who he is?" asked Peter Wilkins in a very matter of fact manner.

The stranger walked away, seemingly having mentally photographed the place, and that was the last they saw of him. At the door he paused and looked at this trio

who had so cleverly discussed him, and the Professor was impressed that he knew or thought he knew one or more of them. But he turned his back upon them and was gone.

The three human analysts went into the dining-room and ordered a meal, such as well men love and can eat; and they ate it with gusto, while the band accompanied the clangor of knives and forks. A general sense of well-fed life prevailed.

The Professor prospected the various tables, but his eyes nowhere fell on the silent stranger. No explanation offered itself to Prof P. Thomas Nelson, as to why that silent man should so impress him and occupy a place in his memory. The trio sat at the same table, but they said nothing that has any bearing on this story, and therefore it would be against the rules of story writing to recount it. But when they had devoured their aromatic and savory meal, they went out upon the street, and separated in order to repair each to his own present object of existence.

CHAPTER XIII

IN these days love-making is not conducted as it was when Mrs. Roche, and Jane Austen, and Frances Burney, and Jane Porter wrote; nor Charlottee M. Young and Charlottee Bronte; nor even E. D. E. N. Southworth and Susan Rawson; but the proposal now usually precedes the period of courtship, which is a very stupid and limited affair. The lovers at present are more emotional and passionate and frank, like animals, than delicate, romantic and sentimental, as they were a century or two ago. The homes now are as little after the old-style home as are the loves of the hour like the loves of old. Like that of the person, the outside of the home is fair enough, but the inside is a desperate confusion and want of taste in moral or ethical adornments.

Two supreme powers or heads, demanding their rights instead of doing the duties in the home, are as sure to clash in time as twice two is four. The first law of harmony in the home commands the performance of *duties*, not the enforcement of *rights*. The law of concession is the most sublime law outside of the decalogue, and it should be written in letters of gold over every domestic front door in all the world, without ethnological classifications or theological distinctions.

“The light of love shines over all;
Of love, that says not mine and thine,
But ours, but ours is thine and mine.”

The game of tennis ended, they sat on benches in the shade to rest and enjoy the intermingling of emotion as well as the pleasures of light conversation.

Peter Wilkins ran, in splendid imitation of the comique, to Olive Pendell and said, quite unconscious of the effect his words would have:

"I'm an expert at avoiding work." Olive shrieked in laughter, and when she had effervessed sufficiently to speak in moderation, she "paralyzed" him by saying:

"I believe it."

Clever Hesperus tingled Miss I. Single's ears with singular sentiment, turning to her with more flavor of gallantry than he had manifested thitherto:

"Don't you know, Miss I. Single, when one gets to being peculiar of finically particular, mentally he is going wrong? I have often thought of it."

She turned upon the wooden seat and almost stared at him. He of all men to describe his own greatest defect so well!

"And some people, not in America but across the border in Canada or down in Mexico, know just enough to give advice liberally, don't you know, and know no more," she replied, fearing to take up his thought and discuss it. Besides, it is impolite to dwell in conversation too long upon any one point or theme.

"Experts in advising; blunderers in practical affairs. But it really does seem that all the nice customs are going out of fashion, so says the Bachelor Girl and she means kissing and matrimony," sighed Peter Wilkins with splendid effect.

"You might include manners, modesty, home cooking, flattery, and flirting," Olive interposed as a footnote.

"Flattery and flirting," objected Peter Wilkins, "isn't nice nor suitable to modern customs of courting."

"You don't know," said Miss I. Single. "You've never tried them. You speak as a Mere Man. How can you know!"

"Have you?" quickly, resting his eyes on her, and thinking her a lovely Bachelor Girl. She regarded him a spicy Mere Man. "Now we have the athletic girl, the tailor-made girl, the bachelor girl, the club girl, the do-as-I-please girl, the carry-my-own-latchkey and look-out-for-myself girl, and a whole gang of nondescript girls. They have usurped the earth, and are trying to knock out the Mere Man by gross stunts of temporary evil outclassing his. She wears no ruffles now, delicacy eliminated, her illusions mercilessly slaughtered; she flirts, and the Mere Man isn't in it."

"Well. And well. She has learned how to make sweet speeches and pretty compliments and tender soulful glances," and Miss I. Single laughed excessively.

"To be sure the gallant Mere Man has turned that field to her entirely. The modern man hasn't time for such subtle delicacies; and when he tries to flirt he does it in a crude, bungling, business-like manner, just as he would order a bill of goods, or eat a dinner, or catch a train. Women have ceased to be delicious mysteries to men, and men no longer tell them fancy sentiments and all that. They are like a well-thumbed book that has been read once, twice, thrice. And so there is no longer any use to flirt; the girl knows all about flirting herself

before you begin—stale stuff. And then she will none of one who has only temporary amusement in view with her, and she cools like an autumn breeze when she finds out his motive is but a side affair. She wants none of the frills of love, and even love is no pastime. So men and mere women and bachelor girls live more apart than —.” Peter Wilkins laughed.

“Yes,” said Olive Pendell, coming to the rescue, “now the fellows are mere means to ends, theatre tickets, flowers, dances, suppers at cafes, ice-cream and soft drinks, fine candies, and a thousand and one ways of making the poor fellows stand and deliver.”

“I wish the girls had to propose,” said Peter.

“Just so. Then they would not be on parade where the mere man can examine, cull, select, and ask,” said Miss I. Single. “And annexed, I should add. By this scheme of courtship some of us go back on the shelf and grow shopworn. At last, mayhap, we are taken by any old thing that comes along, all the prospect gone out of life. It’s better for the man to have the woman really want him and love him, than to take him as her bill payer. Then, too, so many proposals are grand farces, full of tempest but empty of dreams, bungled and slopped over, squirmed and sighed through, and all the rest of it. And maybe he writes the proposal or telephones it, and she—she—well, she usually says yes.”

“There aren’t, then, any real, genuine, Simon Pure, all-gone proposals any more,” said Peter. “He mentions to her casually that he needs somebody to darn his sox, sew on his buttons, make his coffee at the flats, scold him for smoking around the house, object to his pipe ly-

ing around homeless, kick the dog out when it enters, and such pleasant exercises as these, and that is all there is of it; no proper background with full moon and slow music. And they go off and tell the preacher about it and he marries them."

"I think as to myself," began Clever Hesperus in such mathematically exact tones that its effect on the mingled enthusiasm was like pouring a chemical fire extinguisher upon fire, "that it would not be the happiest thing to do to give the men the privilege of refusing."

"They'd take the first chance that came, eh?" suggested Peter. The humor was lost.

Mina and the Professor had occupied another seat slightly apart, but they heard the giddy banter that passed. They approached.

"It is regrettable, indeed, that woman must wait to be asked," said Peter Wilkins, a smile in his eyes. "If she did the proposing, better selections would be made, I make no doubt. But as it is, I am sorry to add, that after marriage she usually dictates. What say you, Professor?"

"To ascertain a girl's age," began the Professor, utterly ignoring the question, "examine her old copy of Lucile, and the passages marked 'How true' were done when she was sixteen."

"If life is a love failure—O I'm no pessimist," laughed Mina.

"Nuns make their love and life an abortion," said Miss I. Single

This startling statement took away the breath of everybody, and all paused. Had she been a novitiate for the nunnery once, and was there a great romance in her life?

They looked at her, but there was not a sign of intuition in her non-speculative eyes. She well perceived the flutter. She leaped from her seat, an act of irrepressible vivacity and bonhommie, and pirouetted like one who had danced in spangles.

"Good folks," she said beseechingly, "I don't want you to mistake this yawning, if it may seem to be that, for I'm not bored,—not in the least. I couldn't help this. Spontaneous combustion."

At the same time, at the farther side of the esplanade, Mina observed a stranger lurking along and seemingly spying upon them. No one else saw him. He seemed gray, and as best she could discern he had a mustache. He disappeared in a moment and was not seen again. His appearance was not of impressiveness sufficient to elicit a remark from Mina to any one. It was a mere passing affair, common at such places.

But in all truth it was the same man that ex-Senator Wadsworth, Prof. P. Thomas Nelson, and Peter Wilkins had so deftly analyzed at the hotel.

"Indeed, if I may make so bold as to say it, I think Miss I. Single could excel at dancing," said Clever Hesperus, quite bookish enough to suit fastidious tastes, though lacking in emotional life and grace.

"That's youth bubbling up," said Peter Wilkins, a grim hiatus in his round countenance.

"I—age! Who said age!" cried Miss I. Single. "Age! I never intend to be a used-to-be or a used-to-do. But I intend to keep on smiling, being glad, to the end."

"That's me! Pardon the solecism," Peter begged. "I say, Christian Science or else Oslerize your old, dead,

foggy, malodorous, dreary, gloomy, sad, depressing, old-age feeling, and sacrifice to the waste-shop every harking-back reflection and lurking regret, and live in the sunshine on the heights, out of harm's way, out of the way of regret and tears and fruitless wishes." Peter thought he had really said a clever thing,—he didn't know. Few can know their best remarks. One never knows when he is saying something that is going to be remembered and quoted.

"It is practically fatal to be struck and hurt with the idea that we are sick, or that we are growing old," added Miss I. Single.

"One of the most foolish ideas," said Prof. P. Thomas Nelson, looking directly at Miss I. Single, "is to think one will ever get back to the *old* feeling and the *old* days of youth—never! We are traveling on—traveling on, and on, and still on, never back—on forward to the end; and every moment is a change, and nothing returns or recurs again. The past is an unalterable record."

Both Mina and Miss I. Single specially glanced at him.

"Monotony, sameness, is terrible to the young, and they will none of it," observed Olive Pendell lightly. "Age less and less seeks change, alteration, and this state of fixity is a proof of age. Age doesn't want its memories or its external suggestions altered. It's different to look up the road and then travel to the other end and look back."

"The handicap of gray hairs," said the Professor, simply throwing out a suggestion, "is serious. Youth can't intimately align itself on equality with 'hoary eld,' and naturally seeks only its own. And as there are fewer old

people than young, the old naturally have to take retired back seats. But the truth is, youth seeks a 'good time,' and age is the master of business by long practice and perfect familiarity. Young men for war, and old men for counsel, you know. Longfellow beautifully treats the idea in 'Morituri Salutamus.' "

"O, folks, how lugubrious you talk," cried Miss I. Single, a sinful shadow marring her lovely face. "Which would you rather be—your neighbor or yourself?"

"Or married?" quickly added Peter Wilkins.

The game of tennis was again played, and the jostling of frivolous remarks and the shouts of gay young laughter went on,—as it should.

At the conclusion of the game Clever Hesperus strolled aimlessly away across the esplanade with Miss I. Single. The Professor accompanied Mina home. And Peter Wilkins walked away with Olive. The game had determined this pairing.

"I love to play tennis. It is refreshing and a health-giving game," said Miss I. Single, manifesting faintly something of a studied effort to be graceful, despite the fact that the natural attraction to elicit grace was entirely wanting.

"The joy of play begins with the child, and I say it with entire freedom from emotion that it is a blessing that it never dies out during one's entire life. And yet it is my chief philosophy that the intellect should rule in life and the emotion be submerged." Clever Hesperus measured the worth, fitness, and meaning of every word with the invariable rhetorical rule along side each one.

There was a pause, wherein all conversation seemed

blocked like a game of chess sometimes, and wherein all suggestion was utterly wanting. The minds of both traveled on different missions and reached different results. He was complimenting himself on his exceeding good luck in having gained the attention of so lovely and beautiful girl. She was thinking of the tangled mess that had brought her to Atlantic City and of her good fortune in meeting Mina Wadsworth. Aloud she wondered:

"I wonder where Mith Gulliver is. Been absent all day."

"Mith Gulliver!"

"That's my Mr. Mikado."

"Really I had not observed," apologized Clever Hesperus, somewhat disconcerted, because she had not been thinking of him in the interim.

CHAPTER XIV

AND thus time wore on at this watering-place, friendships were intensified, romances were begun, dramas set in first act on the stage of life that were to affect the future, and personages crossed life-pathways or entered into other lives in such manner as to modify, influence them more or less to the end of days. But these things were pleasant, a sort of idle trifling with the stupendous. Life is at any rate an incomprehensible fact. These recreative days were purloined from the strenuous lines, or grooves, into which most persons finally merge, and called days of rest. But most of the idlers and pleasure seekers have to persuade themselves with all the powers of logic that the happiness is real and unfeigned.

The evening succeeding the game of tennis Mina and her mother were alone in their cottage. Ex-Senator Wadsworth had gone again to Washington City on matters political. He was not always master of his time.

"Where you been all day, Ben?" Mina asked of the colored servant, the custodian of the summer cottage when occupied by the Wadsworth family.

"Jail!"

"Jail, Ben!"

"Yaasum, ben in jail."

"Why, Ben!"

"All 'count ob a woman. Woman ah neber seen afore

in all my entire born nateral lifetime. Don't knew her a tall. Come round talkin' to me 'bout Miss Demeanor! Neber hea'd o' heh a tall afore in all my bo'n days, suah, Miss Mina."

"What did you do, Ben?"

"Noffen. I done noffen—noffen a tall, I tell you,—noffen. All a misbreak."

"Well, never mind that now, Ben. But have you seen to everything around? That's what I want to know now," asked Mrs. Wadsworth.

"Yaasm—ah—yaasm—eber t'ing—lef nothin' out—nothin' a tall."

"That's all, Ben," said Mrs. Wadsworth.

Then Ben withdrew to the stable, where he had a cozy room upstairs. He looked after the match blacks, the carriages, and the touring car.

"I think, Mina," said Mrs. Wadsworth in no petulant tone, it needs be said, "that Ben has been indulging some in the cup that cheers. I know he is a good faithful fellow, remiss in nothing, but he has been guilty of some misdemeanor, no doubt. Perhaps insulting to some one. Though he is not one to do that."

"Perhaps. But Ben is all right now," assured Mina. "And the dog Winfrey is within doors, I know."

The fact is, Ben had been in jail five hours. It was a case of mistaken identity. The right fellow was found, and that released Ben.

Mina and her mother retired some little time before midnight. They were soon in dreamless slumber, soft as a mossy bank where the Nereids hold their celestial revels. All was perfectly silent within and without,

save the rush of the wind and the lapse of the waves on the pebbly beach.

At an hour not known to Mina something awoke her, some unusual confusion in the house. In the dead silence that succeeded in the room, the rush of blood through her attentive ears was like the flowing sound of distant waterfalls.

She lifted upon her elbow and listened, but not a sound was heard. The darkness was too intense to perceive anything. And yet she imagined she saw a spot a little darker than the rest of the blackness. It might be some one pausing for a moment to await results. It was, she conceived, about the size and shape of a man, though the darkness was too dense to be certain. She stared in intense and breathless attitude. If it should move, the evidence would be convincing. For no man was in the house on retiring, and none should be there now.

Her mother was peacefully slumbering on, her breath coming in measured and heavy respirations. Mina debated what to do. There was no doubt something awakened her. And yet it might not be what she imagined. At all events she saw no immediate need of rousing her mother. She would see first.

Now that it occurred to her, it might be the dog Winfrey, a very large Scotch collie. She would go on and clear up the probably groundless fear in her mind. No harm could result from investigation she thought. She had practically concluded it was all needless alarm. There was not a sound unaccountable. The shadow was absolutely motionless. Bah, she had no cause for fear, she laughed at herself. What she fancied was a noise within,

may have been an uncertain impression made on her mind at the very instant of awaking. She would see.

Silently, softly, deftly she arose, clad in her kimono, and as she stood in the darkness disconnected, as it were, from all things and alone upon a hazard, she listened breathlessly. Not a sound but the regular slumber suspirations of her dear mother. Painful suspense.

The woolfooted dog approached in the solid darkness, and touched her hand with his cold nose. Then she "almost let go and screamed," as she said afterward. A second conclusion came before she could carry out the first impression to scream and suppressed the impulse to manifest her great fright. After reassuring herself she cautiously approached the suspected shadow of a man. It was only her imagination shaping a man out of the dresser. The evidence that her too quick imagination had deceived her, now made her strong and resolute. However at fault her eyes may have been, there was still a lingering feeling that her ears may not have been entirely at fault. And yet they obtained their impression while her brain was not clearly conscious.

Carefully opening the door into the drawing-room, she stepped almost noiselessly within, followed closely by Winfrey. Desperate moment! She paused to listen. Then she gently closed and locked the door. Her idea was to protect her mother in any emergency that might arise. The key was removed and retained in her hand.

With perhaps more haste than she was aware of, due to fear, she finally found an electric bulb and flashed on the light. Coolly,—or was it fear,—she glanced around. But the light seemed to be friendly and a whole body-

guard in itself. She fairly thanked it for its presence. She was now not blind and alone. Instantly she stood in the sheltering light. Or was it truly sheltering? The darkness had been conquered by a touch.

The dog bridled, but remained near her. She read his alarm. She would see whatever happened. Her resolution was desperation.

No, her ears had not deceived her, nor was her imagination entirely at fault. She saw what, by quick instantaneous decision, she decided to pretend not to see. A man's eyes glared and glistened and snapped at her from behind the Davenport. He had something in his hand, and she knew him to be a robber. He was so masked that his best friend would not have known him. She knew the one thought in this unknown parasite's mind was to escape. And he would upon the slightest opportunity. For him circumstances were approximating the desperate. And he must extricate himself from this ugly situation as best he could and that very quickly. Mina instinctively comprehended his mental and emotional status.

She was not impressed that she must scream. So she uttered not a sound. She turned her back very coolly to the fellow. She could half interpret his impressions. Singular that this robber whom she dreaded so much should occupy so intense and intimate relationship in her mind. She stood under the glare of the light a moment. It was an intense, extreme effort. It required exceeding great resolution. She stood with more deliberation under such an extreme tax upon her courage than she thought she possessed. It was the emergency that developed her. She was surprised at her composure, in the

exigency of the moment. But there was great tension. Her heart was fairly thundering within. The critical instant almost exceeded her powers to meet it.

Now, gently and with skillfully disguised tread, meant to speak the palpable lie to the vagabond intruder that he was undiscovered, she went to the opposite door, opened it, and hastily passed through. Quickly as possible, even with delaying haste, she closed the door, leaned against it, and locked it. The dog Winfrey was locked in with the burglar.

"Now I've got you," she said to herself, drawing a first free, long breath.

She hurried to the sitting-room, "phoned" briefly to the police station the situation, and then sat down to listen and to wait. She would not awaken and frighten her mama for "ever so much." Besides, having the fellow safely cornered, it was needless to precipitate a scene. Her mama, however, had been found most collected in very trying conditions. Then she wondered how the burglar and the dog were passing the time. It was quite impossible for the fellow to convert Winfrey into a friend. He would have to shoot or stab the dog to escape him. It was not practicable to mesmerize the dog into obedience. The fellow had better remain absolutely quiet, or he would precipitate war in which no quarter would be shown or flag of truce respected. Mina listened. All was still within.

In a brief space of time two bicycle policemen arrived hurriedly to the rescue. She met them at the veranda steps and briefly explained. She led the two blue-coats to the door. The keyhole showed the light still burning.

Doubtless the undesirable company had intimidated the fellow and kept him behind the Davenport.

The blue-coated custodians of the peace expeditiously and quietly unlocked the door, threw it open wide, and stepped within with drawn weapons. Mina passed in also, and quickly closed the door, to cut off possible escape.

"Come out of there," said one of the policemen, drawing down his steel-glittering weapon upon him. With no effort at defense the man, trapped like a rat, twisted out from behind his hiding place. He left the box he had captured. It proved to be a case of jewels estimated to be worth a hundred thousand dollars. He stood up, with head down. His face was dark with stain and his coat was worn at the elbows. In this case the axiom did not apply, that a coat however worn at the elbows may be buttoned over a generous breast.

The officers took him away. But as he went down the veranda steps handcuffed, he held up his wrists and said to Mina:

"I thank you for these adornments, Miss Wadsworth. It is not your fault; it is mine."

And still a common burglar might know her name. Nevertheless the manner of his remark seemed to have more in it, seemed to imply something common to them both, than might seem at casual notice. Why should he address her at all. She was a little mystified. She turned back into the house in wonder and speculation. The excitement of the last half hour was subsiding into a nervous quaver. The relaxation precipitated a feeling of weariness and weakness. But she would confess nothing to her

mother about this. It was all over now and too late for a scare.

She awoke her mother in the light. Then she narrated the whole story. It was a marvelous thing—astonishing, overwhelming. The mother was confounded with awe mingled with fear.

“How could you do it, Mina! I fairly tremble when you tell me about it.”

“It was just one of those things that came to me, and the rest was easy.”

“My dear girl, what danger you was in!” And the mother clung to her daughter and kissed her, as if to assure herself.

“Not very dangerous, but thrilling.”

“And you are sure you are not hurt, Mina?”

“I escaped whole,” laughed Mina.

The morning papers told all about it, and lauded Miss Mina Wadsworth very highly for her plucky conduct. It was a bold deed, indeed, to face alone a rash, daring burglar, who hesitates not to take life when it comes to a point of detection or capture. And the bold rascal had feloniously seized the very valuable jewel-case, and would have been off with it safe in five minutes more, or less time. To speak the truth, it was a brave act to step into the blackness of the darkness of the room alone with a dangerous burglar. Mina confessed that she had “a sort of creepy sensation at the moment.”

The papers went on to state, what Mina did not know, that the prisoner had escaped. As the officers were taking him up the steps at police headquarters, at a moment when his captors presumed he was securely bagged, he

turned, fled, dashed over the side of the steps, struck the concrete pavement with a jar, and quickly disappeared down the alley in the darkness. But the vigilant conservators of public decorum, so the papers said,—and “the papers never lie,”—were “exhausting every effort” to recapture the fugitive, and they “had every assurance they would yet overhaul him.”

Every one of Mina's friends there called on her the succeeding day, and roundly commended her for her very, very brave act. She was not fully aware, till her friends repeated it and repeated it, that she had done anything extraordinary. And she was in some pain, as one passing through an ordeal, to be obliged with smiling grace and pleasant demeanor to suffer all the flattering things they said. She had captured a burglar alone, and had not screamed, or fainted, or exhibited any feminine antics about it. She was a “hero” with the “ine” elided. And it was not fit for her to deny it or reject the honor they insisted in thrusting upon her. The manly contests of the stadium could not confer more certain or higher honors, nor were the victors in the games more in evidence than she. It was really embarrassing to feel herself the object of particular attention and the recipient of so many fine remarks. She had done nothing but what she should have done, and she could not understand why some folks put so much feeling and meaning and sentiment in it.

Prof. P. Thomas Nelson was the first to congratulate her.

“Not to be fulsome by too broad personal remarks,” he said with scholarly distinction, “I wish to say you have

done what few young ladies have the courage to do. It is quite true, it was no small thing."

Olive Pendell met the Professor as he was leaving. She rushed in, girl like, and throwing her arms around Mina cried:

"My dear girl, how could you do it! It was an awful dangerous thing to do."

Peter Wilkins came before Olive had gone, and bowing with distinguishing bend observed:

"I'm profoundly disgusted with you, Miss Wadsworth. In a minute you have achieved more distinction than I can in half a century. Moral: It is not in us to do it; it is in you."

And when Clever Hesperus said in a sort of condescending exactness she smiled:

"There be those who are feeble, but strong; are timid, but brave; are little, but great; are unpretentious, but executive. I congratulate you on the splendid capture you made. 'Tis true 'tis pity; and pity 'tis it is true' that the armed executors of the law and the keepers of the peace bungled and let the captive escape."

And Miss I. Single came with her friend, Miss Alice Moore-Greenfield, of New York, and both gurgled their pride in a "sister" so brave and true. They said much that can not be untangled here and put in good order upon the printed page.

When they had gone, Mith Gulliver, Mr. Mikado, came, and with a spirited handshake allowed she had managed the capture with more skill than Old Sleuth could have done, or the Pinkertons, or the Scotland Yards,

or Nick Carter, or that mythical chap ycleped Sherlock Holmes.

Many, many more, some entire strangers, came, and said nice things. It was almost a levee.

Her father telegraphed from Washington City:—"The morning papers have told me all. Thanks, dear, brave, good girl that you are. I am proud of you. You are my girl."

CHAPTER XV

THE arrival of Miss Alice Moore-Greenfield from New York at Atlantic City was an event that developed many things,—all without design,—blind fate. The life story of this very young girl illustrates how lightly the marriage vow is regarded by most girls to-day, and the ill consequences that naturally are the outcome of such light and airy-made sexual unions.

The problem of a life partner is a great and exceeding grave one,—one that must be abided by for all time to one or the other,—one that leaves traces across the heart like the slimy pathway of the eel across the carpet,—one that recurs unbidden at all subsequent hours of life,—one that if not wisely made “at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder.” In very truth an ill-mated marriage is the “unpardonable sin.”

Marriage a la mode is “done up” in singular packages, some of them labelled “elopement,” some are a family ceremony, some a church and ring ceremony, some a civil or legal ceremony, some a religious ceremony, some motor all the way down into South Carolina for papers that are a perpetual injunction against all divorce proceedings, some like the Christian Science rite of a solemn mutual pledge, some prefer the Indian way of natural selection, and some the theosophical method where spooks are in-

voked as witnesses, and so on ad infinitum. The presumption in this last form of marriage is that spooks can not witness a ceremony unless it has this only genuine label or blown-in-the-bottle stamp. And the aboriginal ceremony is not in vogue among the Caucassians in this day. In this ceremony the brave steals up behind his intended, strikes her down with a club, and carries her away while insensible.

Now, Miss Alice Moore-Greenfield was a "case," a girl of measurable depth but of a daring, imperious will that set aside all conventionalities. She could do it without very grave scandal, because she had many millions behind her, and because she was Miss Alice Moore-Greenfield.

When Alice entered what was stigmatized as a "co.-ed." college, she did it more for a "lark" than for real profit to herself. At the time she had not passed through more than half her teens, but she was "in for" everything that had "fun" in it.

A new rule of the college prohibited the young men from "keeping the company of the young women." The students resisted the rule, called a council, and framed a petition in the fashion of a round robin requesting the repeal of the obnoxious rule. The young men freely talked, that if they could not be with their sweethearts they would organize a walkout. The girls were loyal to the boys, and declared the rule an "infringement of their rights as coeds."

Alice's dress reached only to her shoe-tops, but she echoed a general sentiment when she said: "The idea! Gracious! Just think of it! Daren't speak to the

boys even at chapel exercises. We won't stand for it! Never!"

The president of the school said that "the school is for business, not a pleasure resort, not a courting place, but it is the guardian of these associated young folks in the absence of the parents."

But Alice and others actually forsook the school because of the rule,—not for a sound, sane principle involved. The matter of self, of emotion, decided their conduct, not level judgment.

The faculty had reached the conclusion, after some discussion in secret meetings, that too much time, energy, attention, and interest were consumed in clubs, "parties," late hours, picnics, hayrides, long buggy rides at unseemly hours, extended walks along sequestered streets late at night, social gatherings, visits, and all the stress of modern society carried into colleges and added to the college duties, already onerous. These things were distracting and demoralizing, and defeated the purpose of the college,—to educate men and women for a better life than is that of the "common herd."

The opposition to the rule was so persistent and corrupting of discipline that the faculty finally modified it, and compromised with the recalcitrants by setting apart an hour a week for social relationship between the sexes. Many romantic incidents occurred in violation of the modified rule. However, before the concession the "impulsive" Alice had shaken the dust from her feet and departed for home.

Her father was a man of exceeding great wealth. He was a physician of national renown, and a man of high

intellectual attainments. By shrewd investments his money had increased in tenfold ratio. Some of his articles on sanative and preventive medicine, information gained by special investigations and published in medical magazines, brought him into touch with the medical fraternity of Europe, and on two occasions he had traveled there to meet in general medical congress. His practice in New York was large. His family took a leading function in the best social circle. His affability was his distinction and his success.

But Alice was a girl whose "impulses" overbore all rules of reason and society, and her madcap pranks, so daring and refreshing and out of the usual, brought her into relationship with gossamer and nebulous tongues, and she was a well discussed girl,—in a way. Dark and lurid things were said of her, but none of them were true. She was perfectly conscious of her innocence, and the shadows of the gossamer tongues brought not a tear to her clean conscience. On the other hand it brought defiance and resistance. Not quite in the circle of the "400," but on the ill-defined borderland of it, she was in no way repudiated by society. She came and went as before. Her reputation was her own, and her freakish little deeds seemed to be more the effervescence of youth's immaturity than the well-planned, cool-headed, dare-and-do desperation of veteran wrongdoers. She was classically beautiful and fabulously rich, and these were salves for all ugly rumors of the irresponsible Madam Gossip. Her pictures were painted by well-known portrait artists and reproduced in periodicals. In the drawing-rooms her graceful, fairy-like dancing was commended very highly, and

her wonderful taste in adapting colors and styles of gowns to her type of American beauty enhanced her loveliness so that it was a topic of general talk and often spoken of in the society columns of the daily press.

After her escapade in the "co.-ed." college, she was put in the hands of private tutors, and then sent to a finishing school. The dreary days of reiterating drill over, she traveled abroad to perfect her lingual attainments. When she returned a string of suitors pressed around her, and her entrance into society was like the dazzling splendor of a great comet. She seemed fated for anything not in the conventional or regular course of human social events, and

"With a heart for any fate,
Still achieving, still pursuing,"

she went on from frolicsomeness to madness. At last the climax came that sent her to Atlantic City and to the attention of the reader. Fate seemed to attend her "impulsiveness" (which in some degree was a hothouse development of her pampering, demoralizing great wealth), and Atropos was as busy with her as she was in the fates of the characters in Euripides tragedies. And in a half-bantering spirit she tragically exulted in her unloveliness, as she described her feminine bravado. She had an "indigent contentment," which she explained to mean "poverty-stricken contentment;" that is, a contentment that would not be satisfied with the common, the usual, but must need extraneous aid; a contentment made a beneficiary of "stolen amusements," as it were; a con-

tentment bribed with gifts of pleasure, pauperized and made dependent on others for entertainments that would make an otherwise miserable existence passably endurable. Scandal,—she dared it to smirch her.

And here follows the evidence that convicts her of being just what the foregoing analysis paints her.

One evening not long since she was at the home of her friend Gilson Lovelace, and was in a very lively, cheery, frolicsome mood with the Lovelace girls, girls about her own age, but much less demonstrative than she in personal deportment. In the midst of the laughter and jesting conversation, the telephone bell rang. Instantly, like the fair maid of Ginevra, with a smile on her lips and a jest in her eyes. Alice ran to answer it. Before the family could respond, though a call not meant for her, she danced to the instrument.

“I’ll answer—I’ll answer!” she shrieked in laughter, fairly fleeing to be ahead of all.

“Yes,” she responded on putting the receiver to her left ear (habit made it awkward to listen with the right), “this is Mr. Lovelace’s.” The gentleman at the other end of the line recognized a strange voice, and she answered very gravely that she was a stranger to him. Then Bertha Lovelace, by speaking into the transmitter over Alice’s shoulder, introduced Alice to a Mr. Ron Cornwallis. He had met the Lovelace girls the evening before for the first time, at a social function and he had called over the phone to make a “date” with them. He desired to cultivate their acquaintance, to a flattering social extent at least. They had much money, were passably lively and cultured,—why not. His name was an

English name, and the Lovelace girls meant,—why not.

Considerable lively, jolly, bantering talk was interchanged over the "phone," and the gentleman noticed a suggestive, daring element in the responses of the bright young lady. She had elements of spacious audacity, a merry voice that tingled like harp strings, a bright and witty and quick return,—she was a novelty, something new, spicy, and flavorful. He was bold, careless, and yet guarded with the suavity of genuine, careful social experience. Each transmitted a spice over the wire to the other that was quickly caught but could not be defined. It was not love; it was the spirit of romance; it was a mystery demanding explanation.

"I assure you I admire your style," said the male voice. That was all Alice knew.

"And I your audacity," she flung back without a chuckle.

"And your voice and spirit I am absolutely in love with," of course disregarding her words. As long as she dared to listen—why not.

"I pity your taste," she said.

"I'm dead in love at first sight," he said calmly.

"I'm old, and have the features of the original maid that was doomed to stay at home always and a day."

"My judgment belies your words. I repeat I'm in love with you," he said. "Besides, old maids display marvelous knowledge of babies."

"I'm as deep in love with you," she daringly, rashly said, violating every rule of beautiful maidenly reserve.

"Then what hinders our marrying," he said in bantering jest.

"Nothing," she said. It was all an eccentric telephone conversation, meaningless.

"Then name the day,—I dare you."

"Are you game?" she returned hastily.

"Never more in earnest in my life."

"I'm yours."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"What castle shall I storm to-morrow to capture you?" he put seriously.

"Fifth Avenue and Broadway."

"What hour?"

"Three p. m.," she answered.

"I'll meet you there."

"Yours truly."

The receivers were hung up. All this courtship and elopement scheme was planned in the presence of the Lovelace family, and of course it was all a joke. Nothing serious in it, and nobody even dreamed there was,—except Alice.

After the jest and laugh about it, all was dropped and forgotten as one of the little spicy happenings in the very commonplace lives of these good girls,—as is the lives of most girls who are bound by the saving laws of social custom. Alice did not forget. And no one could surmise that she entertained the matter seriously. Not a hint was dropped that the jest had seated itself in her heart. She kept her own counsel as diligently as a thief.

The next day at "three p. m.," dressed in a marvelous walking suit, she appeared at the trysting place, unattended, unchaperoned, unhearded, undisciplined, unafraid,

alone, a stranger. She had no hesitancy about how to find the "man in the case." She would know him; he would know her. He, of course, would look searchingly over the hotel parlors, and that would reveal him. It would only remain for her to reveal herself to him. Would she do it?

She looked about as she entered the parlor, and seeing no one that corresponded to her idea she sat down to wait. In a short time a man of splendid presence, fine address, graceful ease, polished manners, a real gentlemanly look and dress, but a fraction older than she imagined, entered. He filled the lively description of the Lovelaces. She knew him at once. Girl instinct. Her stare and emotion brought him to her.

"Beg your pardon, but—," bowing.

"I'm game," arising promptly.

"Miss Alice Moore-Greenfield?" he asked.

"Mr. Ron Cornwallis?" she answered by return query.

"A pal well-met," he said familiarly.

His eye, keen, small, penetrating, steady, hard, dazzling, had something of a treacherous symptom in it, she felt rather than discovered. He was a person above the medium size, of splendidly perfect tone, but of a washed-out, arid enthusiasm. His intensity was by no means the parallel of hers. And his forehead was low and wide, hair thin, long straight nose, long protruding chin, and thin lips cleanly shaved. In up-to-date dress and color, and in unconscious ease in it, she noted the attractive man. He was not new to her. Others were measurably like him. His externals appealed more to her than his reality. A full, open, clear voice, every word was

distinctively heard; they were not dropped out at the auditor in tangled skins, nor were they confounded into a mere wavy string of sound.

He summed her up in one word—"smart." She was superbly gowned; he had secured some knowledge of her ancestry and wealth; she had not a syllable about him. she had not cared to know.

There was no delay in the arrangement of the matter of marriage. It is just to observe that neither was serious about it, and therefore harmony easily secured. They would proceed at once to a civil magistrate. He was surprised, and yet not surprised, at her ready accession to the proposition of a civil marriage. But when he named some stranger to her, she interposed a peremptory no, and suggested a Justice of the Peace that she by chance knew. Without objection, strange to say, he assented to this man. He surmised that opposition would be fatal to this most peculiar and interesting romance. It was indeed a spicy novelty to him, so unusual. Moreover the girl was mature and supremely lovely, and not without a financial attraction.

He hailed an electric hansom, and they went to the magistrate's office, in an unfrequented, Rip Van Winkle-like place, romantic for its solitariness and sleepiness. On the way, for a wonder, he offered her no familiarities, no divine speeches of the poetic afflatus style, no soft pressure of the hand, and she invited none. In point of fact she had prepared herself to resist every improper advance to the very utmost. It was most natural to expect them. The unknown "guy," as she called him, deported himself in a very creditable manner, and her test proved him a

gentleman. And now that he offered no caresses, somehow the real spice seemed cut out of the whole reckless affair. She never once permitted her eyes to rest on him, or linger in his dazzling gray eyes that at moments had an uncertain hue of purple. But he sat with eyes full upon her, devouring her, and speculating about this strange young soul's life and what such an eccentric essence would naturally bring forth in the future. In a short time he would have the mastery of her, and then he would see what she would do. Rash girl.

When they stepped from the hansom, she surreptitiously slipped a bit of note into the hands of the driver. Then they quietly entered the office of the Justice of the Peace, explained the case as far as necessary, and he united them "as man and wife" according to the authority of the law vested in him as an officer of the state.

They paused long enough to allow Ron Cornwallis to fee the magistrate liberally, and then went out upon the pavement. No one was in sight. He said as one with authority:

"We will now go to the railroad station, cross over into New Jersey, and take the train to some interior town where we will remain quietly till the novelty of our marriage has worn itself into a common acceptance in the minds of all."

"Do you have any fears about it?" she dashed out in a tone of unlimited independence. She saw desertion the day after.

"Why, no, of course not," he returned quickly, catching a note of jar in her query.

"There is nobody to placate. I am monarch of myself.

My parents are dead. You need give yourself no uneasiness. Nothing to hinder our going home at once and proclaiming the fact." She was now disposed to taunt him in Machiavelian manner.

"That is not my plan," he allowed.

"However, if you have no objections, I will return to my own home at once," she said blandly. She saw through him.

"But I do object, seriously object."

"Why?"

"I dare not now accompany you to your home, and you know it. There is something false in your proposition. I must say pointedly to you that I've been malevolently deceived, imposed upon, and by a chit of girl," he said rising in his spectacular indignation.

"Hello, Petruchio!"

"Indeed, Katharina!"

"I believe, Mr. Cornwallis, I only agreed to marry you, and not to be set upon, nor to accompany you anywhere, or live with you an instant." Wise girl! "I've fulfilled my part of the contract, and if you will excuse me from making any further contracts with you I will relieve you of my presence."

"Mrs. Cornwallis, the marriage was legal, you are mine, and you must obey me—"

"Beg your pardon, Mr. Cornwallis, I didn't agree to obey, nor to one thing more than I have faithfully performed. I can not think you so tender as not to know what you were doing. You seem to be of a maturer age than that—not a boy, not born yesterday. You can not

deceive me into the belief that a 'chit of a girl' deceived you in an affair of this character."

"I command you, by the English marriage regulations, to obey me."

"You do, Petruchio!"

"And I mean to be obeyed."

"No doubt of it, frenzied sir."

"And I shall be obeyed."

"What a pity that your fine frenzy is lost for the want of an appreciative audience."

"By the terms of the law I mean what I say."

"It would be better, if you did not repeat, Mr. Cornwallis."

"There is redress for all this." His remark was oracular.

His mental comment about her—"smart"—was correct. He was wiser than he was ten minutes ago, and yet he knew it not. If he should prove to be an adventurer, he could obtain some of her money through legal processes brought by a shyster lawyer. The girl was less independent of him than she knew, and the "lark," might prove disastrous. At length she said with hauteur:

"Do you desire to prolong this flirtation?"

"I do not comprehend you?"

"Am I at fault for that?" she flaunted out.

"You are my wife."

"You are my husband, I presume, and I am ashamed to confess that I am not very proud of you."

"You owe me—"

"Nothing, sir, nothing. Have you enjoyed the game

so far? So have I. The play is played out, and here the asbestos falls. We part here, and we shall never meet again upon the plane we are now upon. Bon voyage to you."

She sprang into the hansom, kissed her hand good-bye to him, and before he fairly understood she was swiftly flying down the street. The man steering the hansom caught a sense of the play from her note, and was ready when she entered the novel vehicle.

Mr. Ron Cornwallis was left standing in the street, staring like a defeated man. The last words of "his wife" finally assumed a sense of desertion. He felt he was "sucking his thumbs," figuratively speaking. He plotted to countercheck her game, if it was the last thing he should do in the world.

The exigencies of this story demand that this luckless benedict shall remain here on the street for a few moments.

Alice, without a shadow of regret, or a tinge of shame that her conduct would smirch her good name, returned home, openly and gleefully acknowledged her escapade, and explained:

"He dared me, and I never take a dare."

"But you are Misses now, no longer Miss, and are Mrs. Ron Cornwallis, you know," said the Lovelace girls.

"No, I'm still Alice Moore-Greenfield and nothing more, and never will be anything more," she said defiantly.

Her father had died on a steamer on a return trip from Europe, and Alice was the sole heir of all her

father's great wealth. She was a "swell young girl," rich, giddy, fashionable, but here and there one pointed to her as a "speckled bird." But nothing was ever positively known against her. The reader has seen all the evil there is in her life.

While she was under the confusion incident to her unwarranted conduct, wrong and unlicensed in general, she stole away from New York and arrived at Atlantic City, in a genuine directoire gown and a "merry widow" hat. Undirected, ungoverned, she was destined to the sensational and extreme.

The first thing she did was to hunt up her very close friend, Miss I. Single, and in confidence relate her latest eccentricity. The mutual confidence of these two girls was their own well-kept secret, and each knew all about the other.

They had just called on Mina Wadsworth, glorying in her splendid pluck, complimenting her upon her shrewd capture of the house-breaker, and saying many other things that can not be recorded here—needless, and perhaps meddlesome. They would object to a repetition of it, it is very certain.

CHAPTER XVI

LIARS must have long memories, and so must thieves and roués.

“I have no other wish under God’s world, Miss I. Single, but to faithfully serve you. I call God to witness the truth of this, and I hope he may strike me dead if it is not true. I will sacrifice my life, you know, to do your will and bid, and I say I never yet have failed any one, or failed to do what I say I will. You know I’m all right, and mean all right.”

Mith Gulliver was standing at the edge of the veranda, looking away, for he had not the honesty to look his interlocutor in the eyes. Miss I. Single was half concealed by a woodbine that partly filled the space from the floor to the frieze. There was an evident effort to shield herself from the mid-morning sun.

“Have done with your cut and dried preamble,” she cut in, nervously impatient, a manifestation so different from what she makes herself seem to others.

“Well, you know—”

“I want to know what you know positively,” she said with explosive emphasis upon each word.

“I was—I was just going to say that I had a clew—I say a clew—of Nero Pensive, and I deem it very important, yea most significant,—even more than this, quite valuable. Listen—let me tell you what it is. It is—I have a clew, I say, that Nero Pensive is not in Phila-

delphia any more, but is traveling incog., or perhaps under a resumed name not his own, out some'ers in the great west. I understand he would give his life, no doubt, to find Dean McBarron."

"No doubt. He's that kind of man! And so the rara avis has eluded you again?"

"He's a duced slick citizen, worst ever, and he flees de coop with the greatest sang-froid, and is gone with the greatest of ease, no one knows where—gone."

"What is 'flees de coop,' I want to know," she asked, less curious than she seemed.

"Escapes, breaks jail, gets away, twenty-threes, skid-does, vamoses the ranch, levants, flees, hides from justice,—"

"I understand—I understand—I understand!"

He peered into her face through the honesuckle leaves, his face possessing a puzzled air. He said:

"I shall hunt for him, hunt him up, and find him, too, even if he travels the main-traveled, crowded road to hades. I'll get him, sure, and bring him to you, as you wish."

"When?" she cried in painful suspense. She was wrought up. She evidently hated Nero Pensive,—hated him as if he had done her a grave injury. And had she been in a confessional she would have said she had grave reasons, or at least sufficient reasons for disliking him. Wonder what they were!

"Soon," he answered promptly.

"*How* soon?"

"Not long."

"Do it quickly."

She flung back at him a trite "good morning," dismissing him with it, as she hurried, but for no valid reason, and yet for very good reasons too to herself, across the shadow-flecked floor. Mith Gulliver puzzled a little, but it was too deep for him. No amount of schooling could supply him with brains sufficient to unravel the puzzle. Was she beginning to suspect him of duplicity. He walked off looking seriously meditative. The discovery of his social *lèse majesté* would indeed affect his income. But then—

"O, well, she was just impatient that he is not found, and is not next to my spying upon her for Nero. Nero's a very liberal payer for the service I do for him. I'm really and firstly his paid spy, before hers, and it is most happy to be on intimate terms with her, and be paid in addition by her for playing the spy on her. To be sure, I say, she's a nice-met, handsome woman, and I say it for a fact it is a nice thing to be in familiar relations with her, specially in public. There was a time when I hit London with only a pair of dirty cuffs and collar on, and when I ate at the cheapest boarding-house I could find; but look at me—see me now. See! All by my own skill and smartness and shrewdness and wisdom—all my own. Nero is sometimes mighty hard to endure; mighty nigh past all present endurance,—he's mad. But he pays well, I must say that for him—pays well. I'm 'wise' to the principle, 'Never criticise the powers that be; and stand in with the boss.' I mayn't be big enough to crack a joke, let alone crack a nut like him, as he once said to me, but I know which side my cake's buttered. The earth is sure 'nough big a plenty to turn round in without running over others."

CHAPTER XVII

A DECANTER of old sour-mash, "straight goods," sat on the table between them at the second-class hotel in New York. Nero Pensive was not cultivating social distinction just then, for very good reasons, none of which would be confided to his spy, who was paid to dog the heels of others. It was his theory that if a man could be false to one, even though paid to be, he could be false to another for mercenary consideration, and the longest purse would win all the spy-detective's secrets. So he was not confiding in Mith Gulliver.

Mith had no real conception of the number or gravity of the secrets of this washed-out roue, but he was gifted with good horse sense sufficient not to probe. This was the only way to "keep on the good side of" a man, to "play next to the boss," and bleed his purse in figures of two's and three's. And Mith was ready for any exigency for money.

They "chicked" glasses and passed the contents to that avernus of the body where every decrepit thing travels after passing the portcullis of the lips.

"I must tell you that I have *veni, vidi, vici* the old gal," said Mith Gulliver.

"What!" heroically cutting.

"I have talked with Clarissa Harlow at Atlantic City, and I've come here to New York to tell you all about it,—

a clean breast of the whole truth. She thinks you're traveling incog. in the big west some'ers under a resumed name not all your own, and that I haven't the faintest notion in the wide, wide world where you are; but that I'm now out searching for you, like one hunting for a needle in a haystack, as the fellow says. She wants you, and wants you bad. When you were there a day or two ago, perfectly incog., happy to say, with your false mustache and powdered hair, I say you saw things there then, and they are just about as near the same yet as they can be—no upheavals, nothing new."

"Yes," downward inflection. "Where is Dean McBarron?"

"Now you've got me up in the air guessing. She's a mummy on Dean,—don't know, or else does know where he is. She never speaks of him no more than the dead. She won't express a syllable, not even a breath, not a single word about him. But he's prowling round some'ers in the west, I think, from the best I can get from her conversation, that says nothing—nothing at all."

"Blank, blank you and all of them combined. You do nothing, but bleed me. You are paid to do nothing. And I'm the fool paymaster. I want Dean, and I want at the present writing, to keep out of her way entirely. I don't want to see her at all; I don't want her to know where I am,—in the grave, tell her."

"You don't pay me my worth, I can plainly tell you, Earl. No you don't—don't come any nearer, I tell you. Listen, I say. I got the diamonds—"

"Where—where—where—where?" crying in anything but blasé emphasis.

"You read in the papers?"

"I did."

"She, the owner of the pelf, got me, but I got away by a bold dash for liberty. Then I hung round there all day, the only safe place, gave the police a chance, congratulated her on her bold capture of the thief, sorry he got away, and all that, you know,—"

"What of the diamonds, blank, blank you."

"I'm coming up to that after a while, by and by, I say."

"Don't be so blank slow—worse than a stiff-kneed old freight train."

"When the cops picked me up from behind the sofa, you see, it wasn't high-skilled policy to be found in too intimate company with so valuable jewel case, so I prudently considered it the better part of valor and discretion to conceal it under the sofa. And I know nothing more about the valuables than what the papers said. And all this I did at your planning and pay, when you were down there incog. and looked over the field and required me to test my skill as an amateur cracksman, as a Raffles. You, you know, planned the whole shootin' match, and I took the part of the cat's-paw, playing the star or leading rôle. I risked mightily, I say mightily, getting myself in hock,—risked my liberty, and that's worth more than all money. And I tell you I'm risking it every hour yet. It was not for money; it was to accommodate you. You need cash you say,—so do I,—and I was willing to help you,—willing to do anything for you—."

"Except actually do it. But you really tried in this case to do me a favor, I understand, and failed. The pity is that you failed. When I get Miss Wadsworth's un-

limited purse in my hands, I shall not be ungrateful to you; mark this—not ungrateful.”

“I am yours to pulverize, do with me as you please, heap mud on me, bury me—and all the rest—”

“Your excellence, Mith, is in your wind.”

“Where it ought to be.”

“No, in your heart.”

“I’ve got no heart.”

“True. I forgot.”

They “chinked” glasses again. It was evident for the first time that Nero Pensive was imbibing a little too freely of John Barleycorn, and that he was going down into the stadium of infamy to wrestle with a villain who was never yet vanquished. Social ethics, in looking into the economy of vice, finds no good in dram-drinking, in tippling, in inebriety.

“Is the Professor there?” Nero inquired with the air of one who has just thought of it.

“Yes—there; as large as life and twice as natural. He’s not like other men yet,—will be if you give him time. And he’s dangling idly after Miss Wadsworth. And I believe Miss Alice Moore-Greenfield, one of the latest arrivals, is casting her castor into the ring after the Professor, who is for the moment most popular there with the ladies. Miss Alice’s sunburst smile is very fetching, you see.”

“Who is she?” His eyes intensified, and he looked squarely and deeply into Mith’s eyes.

“She’s a new arrival from this town, and she’s a daisy, I can tell you, a regular peach, a beaut, rich and—”

“A thing of beauty and a joy for ever, eh?”

“Now you’re talking. She wears sunburst-colored silks,

a sunburst smile, and nothing stale about her; no sterile love there, nor a mere excuse for love made out of shredded wheat biscuits, and other like thin Advent diet. She's got a finished look, as the carpenter's would say. And I'd like to call her Miss Olive Oil, or Spermaceti, or something that way,—she's so smooth and slick in nature, and the name should correspond, I say, you know."

"You're dead gone, eh, Mith? Yes, to be sure. That Prof., as they call him, will this Alice girl win out on him, think you?"

"Nah. He looks too boyish to look smart, though he's a man of really distinguished sense. Besides, they are all young there,—and proud of themselves. Now, I say, down there at Atlantic City mere money doesn't make all the social distinction, but brains, mere brains, cut a slight figger, just a very slight figger,—if they aren't cut bias. Brains, tact, and real hospitality count something for real swell-dom. Now, at the height of the season there, one can't find rest for eye, ear, or mind. Colored lights illumine the streets when the sun is down, and flowers blaze by day; and carriages dash everlastingly here and there, and motors chug, and vehicles rumble and ramble, and bands of music fill the air with sweet winds, and the sea roars lashed by the wind; and in the smart tea rooms there is also noise and music and bustle and buz, and the waiters wear picturesque waistcoats, and little pages are dressed in livery, and gay voices pierce shrilly through the enveloping sound of music, and the odor of hot tea and cooked things mingles with the aroma of flowers and the perfume of female gowns; and how pretty it all is—color, noise, music, scent, people, motion, light, and all that go to make up a scene

that can't be named in this world or the next with human language."

"You've caught on, down there, Mith."

"I don't deny the soft impeachment."

"You talk like a novelist."

"I'm taking this all in for a story some day, I don't mind telling you."

CHAPTER XVIII

“**M**ISS I. Single was called away suddenly this morning by telegram,” said Miss Alice Moore-Greenfield, as she stood in the whimsical breeze on the beach, to Mina Wadsworth and Prof. P. Thomas Nelson. She looked riotously joyous and lovely, as the soothing wind bathed her cheeks in fervent caresses and tossed her skirts in freakish delight.

Mina was the truest ideal of the most blessed type of femininity on earth, and the two girls, in splendid youth and health, seemed to be a divine poem in material expression, and something beyond the power of a Pygmalion to sculpture. In the presence of such rare human loveliness Prof. P. Thomas Nelson fairly lifted his heart in gratitude to God for such splendid gifts to man and in faithful reverence of it. And the Professor was anything but easy, simple-minded.

“Any bad news take her there?” asked Mina, simply to obtain her motive for going.

“A matter of business, I believe,” said Alice. But Mina thought she detected a note of evasion in the response.

“Not be absent long, I hope?” asked Mina.

“Not long she hopes.”

Nothing more was said upon the subject. A pause en-

sued. The Professor was looking seaward, as he often does, and likens its vastness to the vastness of eternity—boundless, so far as finite eye can see.

“What dream, may I ask, Professor Nelson?” Mina ventured more as a suggestion than as a query. The interim in the conversation seemed to be heavy and dull.

“Dream! O, I never dream—I always dream—I merely think; and thought is intangible, insensible, and expressed bears no sort of semblance of significance to the auditor that it bears to him who is thinking—dreaming—performing that natural function of mind that generates thoughts. So no one’s dream—and life too, for that matter—is to another what it is to himself.” He hesitated, fearing he had said too much that was too abstrusely ontological to be accepted in a chatty, windy, rambling conversation that is best when it is mere airy nothings.

“Pray, proceed,” said Alice, manifesting an interest he was not prepared to see.

“The dream! O, it was not all a dream. No one’s thoughts are. What was in my mind was tossing up like waves, and was to the effect that one who misses God in his life has lost his life, has made of no significance the purpose in his creation. He is a human derelict. That was what the waves tossed up in my mind in the last minute or two.”

“Do you think God knows all things whatsoever?” asked Alice, her black eyes seemingly fawning the Professor into a yielding mind that is easily led by the captor.

"There is no difficulty in believing so natural a thing as that, if God is all-wise and all-present."

"I stumble," said Mina meekly, reverently, "at the idea that there may be shadows of the grave in heaven; that there may be there memory of sorrows here."

"You have no reference to human fellowship with the dead, such as spiritualists dream is a reality?" asked the Professor.

"No."

With a youthful impulse Alice flirted herself round and as she did so said almost wholly irrelevant to the topic:

"What is your opinion of canned sermons?"

"A phonograph discourse is no sort of match for the enthusiasm that makes words have new meaning and force," said the Professor, like a Professor would say it. "It is enthusiasm, all know, that makes anything—makes everything go. It's the incense of the thurible."

Clever Hesperus had been accurately measuring his steps in the direction of this group of three for some moments. When he came up the conversation veered, as a weathervane in the wind. And no one seemed to be concerned sufficiently to care for the interruption,—an interruption neither welcome nor unwelcome.

"I was just telling that Miss I. Single was called away by a telegram relating to some business matter—something, of course, to do with the bureau of the stage or some 'troupe,'" said Alice mimicking Clever Hesperus' precision, though not his manner.

"Ah! Indeed! That removes an energy for pleasant existence from our midst," said the exact fellow, a little

crestfallen, or at least manifesting slightly a sense of smothered disappointment. Most people's mouths turn down at the corners.

"Very sorry, indeed, for your sake, to have her go," said the irrepressible, impressionable Alice, smiling behind the scenes at the fellow's stupid simplicity and shocking innocence. She resumed: "But, my dear fellow, cheer up—keep smiling, and be glad, and look up, for you still have yourself to keep you company."

"O, as for me, I beg you to believe me quite sincere, I shall survive; but as for the rest of you—" he returned, perfectly conscious of her undeveloped, unexpressed laugh.

"In these modern days of female suffrage, women's clubs and talkfests, and multitudinous social functions," said Mina looking over Alice's head at nothing, seeking to avoid the disagreeable, "women have begun to lay claims to duties and rights that if assumed will be very grave burdens, from which they are now free."

"We should be glad to escape the new obligations and burdens, rather than warring in shameful publicity for extra ones upon her already heavy-burdened shoulders," and no one knew whether Alice was serious in this view or not.

"The ladies have always been waited on by men, and treated with chivalric and heroic politeness, till they have come at length to expect or require preferment and chivalric treatment after marriage. There is the mistake," said Clever Hesperus with some force of expression.

"Don't they deserve it—yet?" asked Alice perhaps a

little querulously hasty. The Professor looked interested.

"I shall not, I beg you to understand me, lay one straw in the way of her elevation. By all means, I want to say plainly, let her become great, supreme, in power and loveliness," said Clever Hesperus a little discomfited.

"O, we are not exceedingly proud of our grandmother Eve," remarked Alice, "but still, gentlemen, we are brothers and sisters, you know."

"Our knowledge of women," said the Professor moving to the other side of the group, "is about as intimate and reliable as is our own knowledge of her dress when we speak of it as 'cut bias' and think we know all about it. But I do think, speaking broadly, that American women are more discontented than the women of other lands. Now, I'm not criticising, nor inviting opposition, nor hazarding a reason for the faith that is in me, but it seems to be a veritable truth."

"Perhaps it is her educated and independent tongue," suggested Alice.

"And if we go to the bottom of her tongue we find a condition that rules the tongue," said Prof. P. Thomas Nelson.

"Correct,—if I may use a current and therefore much abused word," said Clever Hesperus, in solemn impeachment of his mathematical self.

"A feminine mask, I should say, may conceal her 'nerves' and rasped feelings," said Alice glibly with a cheery smile that seemed to radiate from her heart. "And, don't you know, amidst all her face may be as sweet as honey-dew on a meadow lily. But in spite of it all, all

women have frolicsome tongues, and possess a cunning power of making themselves very disagreeable."

"Many homes are loveless," said Clever Hesperus looking around with an expression beseeching approval, "and chiefly because neither husband or wife possesses the necessary tact of managing each other according to their natures."

"To be sure," said Alice. "When a husband sits as censor and sponsor for a wife's conversation and manners and dress, he is very properly lightly esteemed."

"And when a man's wife is his meanest enemy, he is not to be envied, I should say," put in Clever Hesperus, picking up a pebble, looking it over, and throwing it away. "A wife that never offers her husband a caress or a kiss is not a model wife. I know, and could cite it, a match of convenience that never asks a favor of each other. Because they know it will be haughtily refused. And their domestic life demonstrates the fact that there are marriages that are not mated. They are so prejudiced and set against each other that neither can do anything right. Whatever one proposes the other is sure to oppose. No reason is required for the opposition,—they simply want to, and that controls. Perhaps that is a sufficient reason, I shall not say."

These expressions revealed a more intimate knowledge of marital relations and domestic infelicities than he had been credited with.

The quartette slowly moved on, laughing, mingling irregularly, and delivering the raillery of light, fluffy nothings in chirping tones. As they strolled along, regardless of sunlight, breeze, or place, a motor car was seen passing

in the distance. It doubled a corner out of sight in a trice. However, Alice saw, as she thought, Ron Cornwallis.

"Gracious!" she exclaimed in alarm.

"What's wrong?" asked Mina half in pure sympathy and half in curiosity.

"I forgot something." It was an ingenuous and ingenious evasion. She manifested uneasiness. "I must beg to leave you, though with regret. I've enjoyed the conversation more than the stroll," she continued, though all saw plainly that the light had gone out of her countenance and that something real was the cause.

Alice had reached the veranda of the cottage, when the same motor car she had seen before came flying up and paused. Her chaperone was also on the veranda. It was the cottage that Miss I. Single had leased and had offered Alice for the benefit of her lively, golden animation. Neither had the mental make-up that delights in that existence depicted by the old adage: "Never less alone than when alone." And so they had found pleasure together. It was not precisely because they cherished so little of their past lives,—not worth it,—but because they detested solitude.

When the auto-car halted, through some sort of telepathic manner, it flashed upon Alice that the car, a powerful one, was for the purpose of kidnapping her. She consoled herself with the thought that forewarned is forearmed, and hence she would be a wide-awake sentinel against every move, against every wile, against every line of approach, against every assault.

Yes, indeed, it was Ron Cornwallis. But the "other fellow" she had no recollection of having ever seen before. He was stout, beetle-browed, lowering-eyed, and behind

his apparently mirror-made smile, or what was meant for one, he concealed a capability able for any diablery.

"Indeed, I'm happy to meet you here," said Mr. Ron Cornwallis with profound suavity and a well-ordered bow, after he had leaped from the motor-car and approached within distance of respectful conversation. The man had captivating manners, and a style very flattering to women. It was not easy or profitable to resist his dogged persistence in politeness. The man really possessed a secret esteem of himself for his skillful duplicity.

"Don't leave me," Alice said in undertone to her trusty chaperone. The quick-grasping chaperone caught the note of alarm, and pricked up her ears for something out of the daily rut. She paused in the midst of things and stood like a statue.

"Do you expect me to believe that?" asked Alice with the first hasty, inconsiderate flash of response that came to her. "And yet I may flatter myself that you are pleased to see me. I've no special reason to doubt it."

"I've never given you reason to doubt it," he said in mildly beseeching tone, approaching the veranda and looking up at her, a dubious flicker in his gray eyes.

"You've given me good occasion for a lark, I acknowledge, and that is all that was ever meant. That is over and I am done with you for all time to come. You set my teeth on edge, as it were. Your words and manners are too studied, too cut and dried, for my style of life."

"Your cruel words, my love, cut into the very core of my being."

"You speak to vain ears. Not a syllable you say but is idle and worthless,—to me."

"I've been fairly distracted since you left me in such fanciful, forceful way, and now, pray believe me, I'm truly glad, truly glad I've found you." He now stepped upon the veranda. The "other fellow" had made a circuit of the "auto," as if inspecting it, and was now approaching the veranda in an idle manner.

"Richard the Third and Ann, eh?" she sneered.

"O, my dear girl, you so cruelly misjudge me. Pray—"

"I prefer not to invite you in at present, for good and sufficient reasons, and I beg you will not invite yourself in and force an unwelcome presence, as you know, upon me. If you are a gentleman, as you profess by deportment you are, you will respect my wish."

He was guilty of an ugly frown at this. It was not a distorted adumbration of the soul beneath, not a face graced with reason and intelligence, to be sure, but distorted with hate the result of opposition to him. And, too, he saw for the first time the cool, prudent chaperone, and he comprehended why the girl had such an air of quietude and self-command.

"I simply beg a word alone with you, Miss Alice. You can't object."

"Say what you have to say here, and say it short, and maintain your distance."

"O, cruel woman! I beseech you not to mortify me more. This woman need not—"

"She knows all, and she is my friend."

After a pause, at a respectful distance, waiting the nearer approach of the "other fellow," he said in most affected sentimental tone:

"O, there was a good girl, Evangeline! She comforted

her Gabriel, when for aught she knew then they were parting forever. You are my Evangeline, my peace, my life."

"That's very fetching," she remarked in a very sneering manner.

"O, that I might convince you!"

"You have."

"If you would but see!" stepping nearer and lifting a hand appealingly. She stepped backward nearer her chap-erone, Mrs. Belle Revere.

"It would but be a reduplication of the winning of Ann by Richard III, and that play, you know is played out."

"Some things never grow old, and the best is love,—it never is decrepit, it never is untimely, it never is in the rôle of hoary eld. You will see this sometime."

"I at present have no concern about that. I know you have no more genuine love for me than I have for you,—can't have; and I have none for you. You know how much you really have for me, and you know I know how much you have. There's no deception there, and no love lost."

"What did you marry me for?"

"Not for love or money, I assure you, if you need assurance. And you might as well end your pursuit of me before I hand you over to the red-eyed law and its low functions."

"O, I do not fear the law," he said meekly suppressing all bravado.

"I request you now to go away from here, and do not loiter expecting to kidnap me. I'm not running a bluff on you. You see I'm next to you."

"May I see you at another time soon, when you are at your normal self?"

"I have no desire to see you again. And understand, a man may not kidnap his wife."

"Then will you at least bid me farewell, and clasp my hand in token that you forgive me, before I go away never to see you again or afflict you." He moved toward her. She put up her hand and cried sharply:

"Stay! Do not come nearer!"

He sprang forward and caught her. His accomplice ran up quickly. The chaperon, Mrs. Belle Revere, a matronly lady of nerve and decision, seized a broom and ran toward Ron Cornwallis. But the pal intercepted her. Alice turned with a fury partaking of madness, in her eyes a fire of the kind that marks eras in life histories sometimes, a muscular power that she did not ordinarily manifest, and put her hands in his face in tiger-like assault. She clawed, and scratched, and pushed, and blinded him fairly. He lifted her and strove to carry her off the veranda. The accessory wrenched the broom from Mrs. Belle Revere, not without a struggle. The scuffle and scraping upon the floor with the floundering of feet was all the sound they made. But the fellow was of course her physical superior, and after a twist and turn he possessed the broom. She jumped at him as if she would claw his eyes out. But the valiant little lady's efforts were all in vain. She could not even detain him from following closely after his partner who was bearing Alice away. The whole affair was quiet and did not exceed a minute's duration. The two desperadoes were victorious. They were bearing away their victim.

But Alice was madly raking his face with her nails, and it is certain she left some furrows as traces of her fury. After all her caution! Outwitted, taken! His very arms burnt into her being. His success provoked her most desperate feeling. What could she do that she had not done! What could it all mean? If she had but a stiletto she could plunge it into his black heart! He must never put her into the auto-car. The other man now also seized her writhing body, and assisted the captor to carry her off.

Then Alice shrieked. The sharp cry pierced.

"None of that!" commanded Ron Cornwallis. "Stuff a handkerchief in her mouth."

The obedient pal tried to comply, but she rolled her head so that he could not fill her mouth. He caught her hair and with the other hand tried to force the dirty balled handkerchief into her face. She clenched her teeth.

Then Mrs. Belle Revere ran up and hurled a small pot of flowers at Ron Cornwallis. The missile hit no one, fell beyond, and broke into many pieces. Then she lifted her voice. The scream echoed and died away. Again she screamed, more lustily than before. The assistant kidnapper almost fell off the veranda in his haste to get Alice away. Both men stumbled down the brief steps, and almost dropped their burden. Ron Cornwallis now dragged her along. The other man ran at Mrs. Belle Revere, intending to deal her a blow with his fist that would put a quietus upon her signaling screams. He caught a glimpse of a policeman starting out of the shrubbery toward the rear of the house.

As he leaped off the veranda he cried aloud:

"Police!"

He fled past Ron Cornwallis. And now he dropped Alice and ran after. Both sprang into the motor-car, and were gone before the patrolman quite apprehended the situation.

Alice struggled to her feet. The shock was weakening. She could stand but with effort. Mrs. Revere was at her side giving support, and encouraging with her presence. No, Alice did not yield to her emotions and fall into insensibility. It concerned her more to be wide awake then. Mrs. Revere assisted her back to the veranda, and sat down by her side. After a moment Alice explained briefly to the policeman, and Mrs. Belle Revere supplemented the explanation with an account of her part in the short, sharp contest. Both women were suffering from the shock and the fury of the struggle. Both had exhibited remarkable courage and composure, though the fright and stress were most intense. The thought of how near the villians had succeeded in carrying Alice away, and the consciousness of a terrible fight, had a depressing effect; but on the other hand the fact that they failed after all was an encouraging thing and lifted them out of the "Slough of Despond."

"To think that my telepathic warning was practically valueless!" said Alice arising and pacing the veranda impatiently.

"But they failed," said the plucky Mrs. Revere.

"The color of the policeman's coat saved us, and nothing else," said Alice.

The policeman "phoned" in to the central station, and

there they all "got busy." But the men of the mace and the badge failed ignobly to "bag the game." The automachine carried them out of town and away, before the majesty of the law got its running boots on.

An hour later Alice went to the Wadsworth cottage, and she narrated the incident to Mina with graphic distinctness and emotional force. The heinousness of the attempted kidnapping she portrayed in nervous language and impressive colors laid on thick.

Mina was really alarmed that any one, in free and civilized America, should dare to commit such a crime, and in the glare of noonday light at that. She could not find words sufficiently condemnatory to keep pace with the fury of her mind and heart, and so she fairly stammered her feelings in emotional ejaculations. Her vocabulary of strong terms was not large.

In the explanation of the motives of the attempted kidnapping, Alice frankly confessed her elopement with and marriage to the man, and made plain her desertion of him on the door-sill of the civil magistrate who performed the legal marriage ceremony. Her strange, very strange romance, a caper that no sane, self-respecting young lady will be guilty of, was abnormal, astonishing—alarming. Mina confessed her stupidity to comprehend the emotions that should impel anyone to commit a thing so unwarranted, so irregular, so demoralizing.

CHAPTER XIX

THE necessities of politics took Ex-Senator Wadsworth suddenly to Washington City again. This visit necessitated the attendance there also of Prof. P. Thomas Nelson. And the outcome of this was the going also of Mina and Olive Pendell. However, they were to go there a few days later to attend the function of Mrs. Lena Spillman. The others deplored their loneliness that would ensue at Atlantic City. Peter Wilkins allowed their remaining behind was like one at a bountiful feast with no teeth.

Mith Gulliver was, as he fondly averred, in "hot pursuit of Miss I. Single, and would locate her as soon as he obtained a definite clew, which he hoped to obtain without further delay." He declared [but do not believe him, my reader] that Miss I. Single, or Clarissa Harlow, had gone to New York, where Dean McBarron met her by appointment. He said she wished to know how he was passing the idle, empty days, and whether Dean was "keeping posted" on the movements of the several personages in this drama.

Alice Moore-Greenfield and Peter Wilkins and Clever Hesperus formed no very fortunate combination of mental and emotional entities, and so time dragged along slowly, heavily, with no bow of cheeriness and buoyancy in it. And there was no certainty as to the length of time this chimerical association would continue.

On the train to Washington, Ex-Senator Wadsworth said to Prof. Nelson, that as he understood it the Professor would be sent to England to study the social conditions and the sentiment among the commonalty.

"While there, Professor, you may meet King Edward and Queen Alexandra," suggested the Ex-Senator. They were skimming over the land in the "flyer."

"I should esteem that a very great pleasure, I assure you," returned the Professor enthusiastically.

"I understood the Queen is not happy," said Mina in a sort of inquiring tone.

"Once a roué always a roué," said the ex-Senator. "And the first roué of Europe's old paths, traveled at a swift gait when young as Prince of Wales, still appeal to him, and will to the last. So he neglects his Queen—never did care for her for that matter,—lured on by his love of pleasure, the 'ruling passion,' and with a blunted sense of the proprieties, or a total disregard of them, the Queen enters little into his life and less into his thoughts. So the Queen is embittered, discontented, irritable, and growing deafer every day. I speak by the card, to be sure. In his declining years the King is going back in memories to his early life, and so is traveling much on the continent and revisiting old places. The Queen is no longer the youngest old lady of Europe, and her sharp tongue has become a terror in her husband's palaces."

"How old is she, Mr. Wadsworth?" inquired Olive Pendell, the inquiry in this case as to a woman's age being entirely fair.

"She is past her sixty-third milestone in the journey of life, and she looks old despite the feminine aids to youth

applied in the toilet. She kills her idle time by charity measures and attending plays. Her daughter, Princess Victoria, is forty years old, and husbandless."

"Is she not a Norwegian?" asked Olive seeking more certain information.

"Yes. She has had to put up with much since she married this luxury-spoilt man, and her trials are known by all England, and she is pitied."

"I have had speech with her Majesty," said Mina, "and I took her to be a lovable, disappointed, sad woman, conscious that her life has been broken, that it has not been rounded out full as the promises of her beautiful, fresh young life warranted and held out to her as something more than a bare possibility. Her dream of life was illusive."

"Marriage wrecks many lives," observed the Professor looking straight down his nose, conscience smitten. If the remark was true, it might be uncharitable and impolitic.

"That savors of the type of thought of the Mere Man," returned Mina, bordering the controversial attitude, though visibly careful in selection of words to convey her idea.

"Wrecks more female than male lives," added the Professor as an after thought.

"I agree with you," assented Olive. "There are very many love dramas in real life."

"May I tell a story briefly that fell under my limited mental survey?" said the Ex-Senator, leaning back in his seat idly for a moment. The man was too physically energetic to retain one bodily position long without altering it.

All urged him to go on.

"It is a singular, if not remarkable case," he resumed. "She married him, more because he was so persistent and so profuse in his gilt-edge love language than because she thought him the ideal, the only man on earth. The silver tongue of a legislator of our Old Dominion uttered a speech that won this married woman's unbounded admiration. He was the only—only man, and her husband, who was ever but secondary in her thoughts and heart, she still esteemed but no longer pretended to love even in a farcical way. So she took the silver-tongued legislator's photograph and presented her case undisguisedly to her husband. His name was Jason Redman. She pleaded for a divorce. Mr. Redman was astonished at her whim. In truth he was more than that, he was shocked and heartbroken. To find where he stood in the affections of the dearest, sweetest woman on earth for him. But he was wise enough to measure up the case in its fullness and ramifications, and considered it sheer folly to continue longer in this unnatural and unholy alliance with her. So he granted her a divorce and gave her also half his estate, and nobler still his departing blessing with tears. 'With all her faults he loved her still.' Then the silver-tongued legislator, Vester Silverman by name, had many crushing scenes with his tear-pleading wife, and finally put her away on an untruthful charge. This fact, if I may pause long enough to say it, demonstrates which of the two men is the better. And we disagree in toto with Mrs. Redman's judgment. Mrs. Silverman found letters in her husband's coat-pocket from Mrs. Jason Redman, and then the chagrin and poignancy of her situation became pathetic and crushing. Mrs. Red-

man declared she loved Silverman because of his charming speech before the legislature. She had never seen him, but the reading of the speech enmeshed her heart. Others failed to see the peculiar sweetness and fitness of his oratorical effort. And it was highly probable he would never again rise to this first high-water mark in her estimation. Therefore it seemed that both were uniting themselves to disappointment and an unhappy destiny. Both were human creatures still, no better than they were because she loved him, and this fact would be disclosed to them sooner or later in most unsatisfactory manner. She said she loved him at first sight and first sound of his voice. Perhaps there were psychological reasons for this, taking it for granted that she uttered the truth and had not been deceived into trumping up reasons. They married. Were they happy? Ask of the winds that far around with fragments of love strewed the sea. Man never is but to be blessed, so the optimist says, and according to the law of opposites the pessimist puts the converse, man never is but to be cursed. The one is as philosophically true as the other. The two divorced people never married, and were never again blissfully happy or *en rapport* with life. Those people who set up to housekeeping with only a rocker and a broom seem to stand the best chance of encountering happiness."

"I think both divorced people are to be congratulated on their freedom from such unequal and unworthy life partners," said Olive Pendell, exhibiting more acuteness of observation in her remark than a girl of her age was supposed to possess. But not many knew the good, noble girl.

The Professor observed with peculiar sincerity:

"Want of adaptation,—unequally yoked,—mismatched,—married but not mated,—emotions mistaken for love." He looked as if he regretted that there is no absolute rule for determining congeniality, or mental and emotional fitness; in other words, one's nature-made life partner, not the mere family-made or law-made associate. He cited a divorce case that was similiar to the one related by the ex-Senator, though the setting was different. In his case the "phone" and the bath played a prominent part.

"I'm convinced," said Mina, who had given her idea some consideration, "that the church should not marry divorced people who are at fault. The causes are various and fanciful. Too much money induces extravagant living, too much epicureanism, too much fine raiment, too many fast automobiles, and too many divorces."

Both the Professor and Olive looked at Mina either to see whether she were laughing or insincere. For her family, mainly her father, had almost unlimited acres and great overlordship in his commonwealth. Her relationships ruled the politics and the business of the state,—to such an extent as to merit the common appellation applied to their particular section of the state as the barony of the Wadsworths. The Davis-Elkins supremacy in West Virginia was in part the duplicate of the Wadsworth sway. The Wadsworths, too, built railroads, opened mines, developed the forests, made known the state's resources to the world, built public highways across the country, and invited capital to localize with them. Their confidence in their undertakings won them support and encouragement, and they amassed practically

unlimited wealth. Wealth is power and commands respect and position, and so Mr. Wadsworth was honored with the United States Senatorship from his state by the legislature. He was a wise, diplomatic, long-headed man, and rarely made either political or financial mistakes.

Really most of Mina's conscious mature life was not passed at their country seat, Acadie, but in Washington, where her father's magnificent residence was the open house to a wide circle of the best people of the capital. But Mina was an out-of-door girl, delighting in games, drives, rides, skating, hunting, and other outdoor entertainments. But she was too level-headed to be hoydenish, prudish, outdoorish in tone, and she knew her place, capabilities, and duties, and like her father, never omitted a function belonging to her. She was genuinely a typical American girl of typical American beauty, equally a favorite within and without doors. A sane country idea of life, splendidly cultivated, of some pencil-pushing distinction, a great favorite in society, there were no faults in her life setting. If one may be blunt, she was regarded as the catch of Washington, and many young men—and others not so young—angled for her hand and plethoric purse. And now the general gossip of Madam Rumor had it that she was going to marry an English Earl. And she did not deny it. It was even said that as an international marriage, it would be an innovation, excelling even court splendor of the old-world *recherché* marriages, quite rivaling Alphonso and Ena's marriage. Though, it would be entirely an American marriage.

When Mina alluded to over-wealth as a popular cause

of divorce, as already said the Professor and Olive looked at her in the manner of a query.

"I'm not convinced that it's wealth," argued the Professor, "but I'm quite sure it is in the creature before wealth gives the easy opportunity for divorce. This seems plain to me."

"Yes, to be sure it's in the creature, or wealth couldn't do it," said the ex-Senator. "Out west, if I may tell a tale in four chapters, a romance occurred like this: Chapter one is, January, 1907, Mr. Young Man to lace-loving Miss Ruffles, a diamond worth three hundred dollars by express. Chapter two is, May, 1907, return of letters to the fair Miss Ruffles. Chapter three is, May, 1907, returned to Mr. Young Man a package valued at fifty dollars, letters. Chapter four is, June, 1907, Mr. Young Man married to Lovey Mary, and Miss Ruffles married to Elwood Again. Diamond lost in the shuffle. How lightly the *vinculum matrimonii* binds 'fond hearts and fine faces.' True hearts have been civilized out of existence, if we deduce a conclusion from what we daily read."

The Professor started in:

"The present neoteric fashion of spending the honeymoon on a railway car is not a normal human manner of life. Voltaire in his romance of 'Zadig,' in the third chapter, says that it is written in the book of Zend that the first month of marriage is the moon of honey, and the second is the moon of wormwood. The application of this is that most people marry ignorantly. Too many wives allow themselves to become an uncomfortable bundle of rasping nerves, and as our friend Peter Wil-

kins says she then too often starts the mental wheels to going that electrocute the hub,—I quote literally.”

“I’m not a believer in lynchings for base deceivers of others’ wives or daughters, nor the crude justice of the ‘unwritten law,’ nor the appeals to passion for legal redress, but I do believe in roundly reprobating the affinity dodge,” said ex-Senator Wadsworth looking blankly out of the car window, seeing nothing and desiring to see nothing.

“The *Fineas Earl* farce shocked most good people at the time,” said the Professor. “A plucky Kentucky wife walked in upon her husband and his ‘affinity’ and shot the ‘affinity’ dead, the husband fleeing lest he get too what he so richly deserved. The dishonored, disowned wife said she had been compelled to kill the ‘affinity’ to protect her own home. The jury exonerated the brave wife and set her free.”

“Bravo,” shouted Olive. “This invention of a term, ‘soul mate,’ which simply covers up a multitude of sins, is no sort of exoneration for the dishonorable association.”

“Modified spiritual polygamy is all such associations can be at best,” said Prof. P. Thomas Nelson, casting a shrewd eye at Mina, though endeavoring to conceal his act.

“I do not wonder at the loose marriage views held by so many nowadays,” began Mina, “when we regard the clubs, orders, societies, combinations, organizations, meetings, and all the outré views on marriage from free love and free expression advocates. Then the very foolish people who profess to believe in the ‘absolute foolishness of

marriage by law' stand in almost ribald jest in opposition to those who believe marriages are made in heaven. Most of these faddish ideas have an organization, and propose to do missionary work. Propagating, promoting the foolishness!" She was very much awake to the idea.

The conversation touched very many issues of the marriage and divorce question, and was, in fact, prolonged until the whistle announced the arrival in Washington.

There they took a cab for the Ebbitt, where they were duly deposited.

CHAPTER XX

THE press had made the public familiar with the ways and customs of Mrs. Lena Spillman of Washington. She had an extensive acquaintance abroad, to be sure, and when some foreigner arrives in this country she sends a written invitation to him, in most correct form to visit her. And a stranger, glad to enlarge his circle of acquaintances, he invariably accepts. And whether he dwells in her home or in the legation of his country, he cheerfully responds to her invitation to functions. The diplomatic contingent naturally are a "swell set" as well as good diners, and they go habitually where the best things to eat and drink are tendered them. And Mrs. Spillman's social occasions are really a pleasant place to be. The Spillmans made their home the arbiter and center of Washington society, with the ulterior object of making distinguished matches for their attractive and correct daughters. But the game of utilizing the diplomatic corps and visiting foreigners for their social uplift and prestige is elusive and often a failure. And yet the trial is made.

And Mrs. Spillman is callous to the criticism that she is guilty of placing her own daughters in the way of His Grace and His Highness, rather than of presenting according to strict good form some lovely belle whom she is bound to bid to her feast. And she has been accused by

jealous mammas of deliberately and rudely smashing tete-a-tetes between her lions and other Washington girls, forcing the lions to pay attention to her own daughters.

She on one occasion omitted or forgot to include the name of Miss Minna Wadsworth in the list of her dinner guests, because at a previous meeting an Italian duke paid more court to her than to her own daughters. And she further made special effort to marry Miss Mina to a certain American of distinction to remove her out of the way of the Italian duke. Mina simply smiled. And Mrs. Spillman wined and dined many Washington catches in order to have a clear way for her daughters. And she at this time pooh-poohed all newspaper rumors that Mina was engaged to an English Earl whom the madame was seeking for her own daughter. He was her own find and she was watchful of him. But happy to say she was not discouraged nor cast down because she had found many a husband for some other American belle. In Spain once she was almost certain for a time that she had captured a Duc for her fair young daughter Alice. To be perfectly candid, these sisters were most charming girls, and while they were not "raved over" they were greatly admired and even petted by distinguished gentlemen at home and abroad,—despite the fact they had a mother! Mrs. Spillman often hurt her daughter's cause by undesignedly seeming to be a "scheming, managing mother." She was ambitious and anxious to lead and to monopolize the social functions in Washington and gain eclat thereby. The "butterfly counts" who could out-Cupid Cupid, and salaam and elusively bow with unrivaled grace, and the splendid catches in the embassies were specially in evidence at her

great entertainments, but someway they did not propose to her daughters.

As one to assist in receiving at the White House Mrs. Spillman rose to the occasion with proper and imposing hauteur. The costumer's art supplemented nature in giving her the air of the grande dame, and she sweeps into place with the air of Juno and greets even with icy mein and condescending dignity, in order to maintain her resolution to keep society and officialdom at their proper distance. Nevertheless, in the presence of her titled guests she was cordial, simple, and unaffected to admiration. Her ambition seemed to be to create the impression that she was to the manor born.

This mid-summer fest, a sort of expiring social throe before the slow-dragging, late summer inactivity consumed them, was a final throw of the matrimonial lariat to capture Earl Nero Pensive. Mrs. Lena Spillman was not aware of the relationship he had acquired with Miss Mina Wadsworth, or she might have been forgotten from the list of guests again. It is certain, however, that no one in Washington knew anything about "his private character." No one seemed to pause to speculate on what such a "lord's" private life must necessarily be.

Ex-Senator Wadsworth and Mina, accompanied by Olive Pendell and Prof. P. Thomas Nelson, on this lovely summery, sunny afternoon alighted from the powerful auto-machine at the Spillman's. Others had arrived earlier.

They were ushered into a superb dwelling, furnished with the best that money and taste could give, and adorned with every grace and convenience that wide experience and much travel supplied. The reception of them by Mrs.

Lena Spillman [there was a husband somewhere among the roses in the background] and her sweet, lovely, blushing, young daughters could not have been more correct nor less reserved, more formal nor less cold, more magniloquent and stilted nor less charming, more correct nor less haughty, more dignified nor less stiff, more *comme il faut* nor less welcoming.

In a little time Earl Nero Pensive arrived, and was petted and patted and made much over, without bringing a relaxation to the concealed frown in his eyes. But he took it all as a matter of course, empty and hollow and shallow as it seemed to him, restraining an impulse to resent the unwarranted familiarity. He understood the situation, and was less concerned about Miss Alice Spillman than Miss Wadsworth. The dot from the latter had in it the element of a probably larger sum than the former. Besides all this, Mina was a decidedly more lovable and lovely girl, and in all ways would be the most acceptable capture. With him it was not a matter of sentiment or social function; it was purely a business affair. He was not disposing of his title to an upstart American, without written and traditional lineage or heraldic honors, for a palliative or a plausible possibility. It must be a certainty, the clean cold cash, in exchange for the title he should give the presumptive petty *femme nouveau*. Her position or sentiments would not be considered. It was simply a problem of transferring some good American coin to England for his special behoof—nothing more.

Though Miss Mina Wadsworth had not given him definite assurance of her own mind or real attitude toward him, yet his self-confidence and reliance upon the magic

of a title assured him that with proper time and opportunity she must succumb to his wish. He had implicit faith in his captivating powers; he was not so certain of her capability to defeat his scheme.

In the conversation they had upon the point of uniting her fortune with his title, she had not shown the docility and spirit that submits without at least a picturesque flourish of opposition, but he had conceived that what she did and said was but the outward manifestation of an inward state quite the contrary. He noticed, as he thought, that her proud, bumptious young Americanism was simply performing a "stunt" of untutored gymnastics, and after the exhibition would readily yield to his superior enterprise in insisting upon her thinking in the case as he wished her to think.

After his court of ceremony to all the Spillmans and his gratuitous gift of smiles from his limited supply, he immediately sought out Miss Mina Wadsworth. He remembered that his notice of invitation solemnly informed him that he would be regarded as her special guest, and therefore his chief attentions belonged to the Miss Spillmans. At the table he performed all the duties perfect form required.

Mina had foreseen that she would meet Nero Pensive here, but she could not foresee what would transpire. It is really significant, it must be said, that she had requested Olive not to be absent from her through the whole time for a single minute. And the two went about like inseparable friends. It is readily comprehended that Mina was mistrustful of her impressions and her pos-

sible conduct when alone. The Professor was too well-bred to neglect his duties as a guest.

Nero Pensive somehow had the satisfied sense that Miss Wadsworth had come to Washington expressly to meet him, and this idea kindled him like an inspiration. He was in faultless clothes, though at present he was talking in magnificent figures, like Colonel Sellers, and dealing in dimes. But this was his profound secret. His smile did not rub off during the whole evening.

Miss Mina Wadsworth put forth no effort to outshine the company present. Her gown was superbly rich but inconspicuous. The diamonds she wore were the very ones the robber had captured in their Atlantic City cottage, and Nero Pensive had well-grounded suspicions of this fact. She was in splendid mental dress also, and as bright and ready to respond in speech and laughter as she ever was in her life,—but not in the light frivolous sense of the up-to-date girl.

They met and bowed. His unimpeachable smile greeted her, she thought, as if he were conferring a favor on her and not a gallantry. She had met him first in Paris. He had followed her and her father to London. His stay in their country home, Acadie, was a protracted hope rather than pleasure. It was scarcely a hope; it was a method for pelf. She expected nothing from him, and certainly he owed her no peculiar favor or marks of distinction. And when she came to think of it she desired none. When she paused to catch the elusive emotion that was scarcely acute enough to germinate words, she was impressed with the fact that his was a strange personality. There was something observable but indefinable in him,

—a note of dissonance somehow,—and she felt it rather than saw it. She was peculiarly, if not divinely and subconsciously, sensitive to the non-interpretable impressions that others made upon her. Her telepathic sense, contrary to his seeming graces, excellent courtesies, polite manners, flattering attentions, elegant but extravagant phrases, and smooth, oily words that speak and purpose not, whispered an alarming “beware.” Was it a warning? No, it was merely an impression, nothing more. It was quite too faint a sense to coach into special attention and significance.

Earl Nero Pensive and Mina and Olive had strolled out into the garden and were engaged in a triangular conversation, much to the chagrin of the Earl who regarded Olive as *de trop*. The Earl could not think she was there by connivance, or that Miss Wadsworth was unwilling to hear his venerable message, and so he assumed that Miss Olive Pendell was blundering to the harm of himself and Miss Wadsworth. How was it possible for him to be mistaken in supposing that Miss Wadsworth had come to this function given in his honor except specially to meet him and answer him favorably. He could not surmise she was less tractable or less easily conquerable than he had fondly believed. In his category all women were alike and therefore all were capable of being won,—by him.

“I presume I tell you no cornfield secret,—one not given in urban situations,—when I say I am expecting a cable message any time, recalling me to my *mater patria*.”

His words had the polish of measured consideration. Mina noted his phrases, “cornfield secret,” and was sure

she knew the impression that gave it birth. America was a new land of agriculture and so of vast cornfields; while England and Europe were urban lands. It simply developed a smile that he did not misinterpret.

"Sorry to lose the excellence of so entertaining, valuable product of European urbanity," said Mina in her sleeve. "We clodhoppers need the refined influence of European perfection."

He had not expected the retort so direct. The two girls sat down upon a rustic, park-like seat, while he stood in indefinite mood before them, feet apart and fingers laced together in front.

"But believe me I'm very particularly charmed with this delightful, surprising, strenuous country, and I think its women the most superb on earth, not excepting the beautiful, world-renowned Circassian maidens."

"We echo that sentiment," said Olive, plying her feather fan with more than languid energy.

"But I know there are very lovely women in your native land," said Mina.

"I know that Stephane Lauzanne, editor of the *Paris Matin*, protests against the saying that America is the kingdom of lovely women. To sustain his objection he says the master of the house goes down town, transacts his business, lunches down town, closes his office at the end of the day and enters a club, dines there maybe, and goes home to bed. Meanwhile the wife, this Parisian scribler asserts, is condemned to pass the morning in a long walk, with a look on her face suggestive of a winter landscape and an emptiness in her heart suggestive of a deserted banquet hall with the lights out. No, he thought

America not an ideal place for women." Earl Nero Pensive was inclined to believe the Frenchman, though ostensibly denying him.

"I'd like to know the premises for his remark, the extent of his opportunities for observing American life and women," said Mina in a way that had a critical meaning in it.

"I may assume your wise and critical editor," said Olive, "had no experience with beautiful women in our country that he is ashamed to repeat."

"That I'm not permitted to know," said the Earl, permitting luxurious smiles to decorate his unreadable, illegible countenance for a brief instant.

"I think, perhaps, Monsieur Lauzanne spoke hastily," said Mina listlessly, perfunctorily.

"By a voluminous correspondence in the *Matin*," said the Earl, altering his position of body, "it was decided in the affirmative that love, in the progress of the times, has reached a crisis. French men and women, it was thought, fall in love less fondly and deeply than formerly, and the grand passion is altogether out of fashion."

"You say the French have so decided?" asked Mina, an ulterior suggestion underlying her inquiry. She turned in her seat and looked aimlessly at Olive. Olive's eyes were on the ground.

"Yes, a French view." He resumed: "They say unions of the sexes, temporary or permanent, are but questions of material interest only. Sentiment is banished, even in your novel country in some degree at least, and Mrs. Burnett's novel, 'The Shuttle', clearly demonstrates it is banished in my country. To be sure this is American testimony. I do not impeach it, but it is not sufficient to my

mind, an English mind, you understand. However, this seems to be true, at all events, that the average girl will not marry these days, unless the young man's position in the world is entirely made,—a period in life when the hair is gray or gone and youth a thing of the past."

At this instant Mrs. Spillman, feeling the necessity of ubiquity, came flaming up, laughing, and saying in a pretended jest:

"Your absence has been remarked." She was exceedingly rejoiced to find Olive a fine third present.

"We had not meant to be impolite, or afflict others by our absence," said the Earl benignly sarcastic.

"My dear Earl, may I relieve the rest of the company by escorting you back and show it that its fears were baseless?" said Mrs. Spillman with suave indifference manifested toward Mina.

"Certainly," meekly, eyes down.

"And you, girls, come upon my other hand and we will all go together, the happiest quartette of all present." She dared do no less. But the reproof was less apparent.

They fully comprehended the dear anxious madam's motive. Non-compliance, and that graciously, would have been ungenerous if not unkind, and this she knew. It is not difficult to understand how such a woman detected their absence, and how she found them. The act in bringing the derelicts back into the throng illustrates the metal of the woman.

And the painful circus [move modish to say *comedy*] went cheerily on. It might be summed up as a social event consisting of dresses, smiles, formal words of no trustworthiness, graceful manners, and bored men and women

from many walks in life. The directoire gown was not popular as yet at such society gatherings with a motive in them, which everybody knows and smiles over in secret.

Earl Nero Pensive really began to see in Mina a proud distinguishing look, a graceful, lovely air about her, a natural instinctive independence, a winning bearing, a charming tone of voice, a comely walk, a woman exquisitely gowned, a smart speech, a native shrewdness,—a woman to be proud of anywhere. There was no disguising the fact to himself that she was awakening dormant feelings in him, feelings resurrected after being as dead as Lazarus and buried much longer. He was not proud to discover his possibility of being netted by a mere woman, even in ever so slight a degree, though he confessed it was a novel and perhaps pleasant sensation. And he found himself more uncertain about her zeal for him than he was at first, and this perplexity annoyed him. His former certainty had altered into a debatable proposition with himself, phrasing it in the most conservative and agreeable language possible, and in the private forum of his stale heart, the unseemly, made discussion was waged.

He remembered when Clarissa Harlow first sang a "Sammy song" to him to come and kiss her. He took her at her word, scrambled over the footlights, and would have kissed her in the presence of the whole audience had she not escaped behind the scenes. This was his introduction to her. Those were first days, when a "monologue artist" could decry the "cheap skate dude," and foolishly demand of some one, "don't look at me in that tone of voice." Then the capacity for enjoyment was fresher and life was the richer for its youth.

Once again restored to the mingling, jangling, pretending throng the Earl politely turned his attention to Miss Alice and her sister, while a dashing young American was "turned loose" on Mina and Olive.

Long before the Earl had made up his mind that this was no place, considering the espionage and assumption of the mamma, to "make love," not of the Romeo-and-Juliet kind, but of the enterprising kind that is a successful business venture, a clamorous old clock somewhere "butted in" and impudently tolled off the,—“time to go home.” The clock had wandered through the day with various inflections and successes to different men and women,—dependent quite on the viewpoint of the human creature. No, the Earl did not think of Titus, and should this Roman have entered his mind he would have called him a crank and a fool.

As Mina and Olive and the Professor and the Ex-Senator departed, Nero said in a confidential aside to Mina:

“I’m so desperately disappointed. I must see you soon—soon.”

“At your pleasure,” she said and she knew not why. It was not what she had decided to say in such an exigency. She was half provoked that her evil nature had predominated and ruled at the critical moment when she should have been the sanest.

Mrs. Spillman, decidedly at the wrong place at the right moment, dashed out upon these departing guests, wished them *bon voyage*, and smiled a large moon at them as she triumphantly led the discomfited Earl back to her daughters. They should have his last, final, cordial love-word, she hoped and prayed. Why would not the old-world titular

gentry offer themselves to her daughters, good as gold, the sweetest, best, most beautiful and lovely in all America, and make her and them serenely blessed! She was too cunning and clever to utter an unflattering word about Mina, but as Scott phrased it there was no treason in enjoying her thoughts under the shade of her own bonnet. Soon the upset Earl bade his hostess and her two lovely daughters a quiet, unpromising, non-hopeful, non-suggestive good-by. The mother was discomfited. She had seen no encouraging signs. It passed her powers of reason.

"Gracious! Another social function performed, and nothing in it," she reflected to herself, though she was divinely cheery to her daughters. "I'm destined ever to be crossed by that Ex-Senator's daughter. I can't see why she is not satisfied with Peter Wilkins or that other bright young American I put in her way to-night. For my life I can't see why she is preferred to my charming, traveled, cultured, sweet girls."

Her plans had all ended in smoke.

The Professor was not given to romancing, but this Spillman affair had set him to thinking seriously. He lamented for one brief minute:

"Indecision! O indecision! Thou curse! Indecision, inaction, non-execution, shilly-shallying; hence through indecision written works are withheld from men and their consequent lessons. Accomplished facts and the history of things done are men's monuments."

For one thing now he must know. And that before he disconnected himself from the shore line of his greatest, best country on earth and set foot on a foreign shore. It had been determined that he should be the head of a

commission sent to England to investigate financial methods, banking laws and privileges, and the elasticity of the commercial medium of exchange, looking toward an international law to regulate bills of exchange. So he had come to think that life would be a mere bauble, nay worse, a bubble to him, if he and Miss Mina Wadsworth could not unite their life interests and forces and travel along life's rugged pathway together. He had written some books on serious economic questions and shown a comprehension of the problems considered to such a commanding extent as to win favor with the President and the best intellects of the country.

Earl Nero Pensive was not ignorant of the merits or the attractions of Prof. Nelson, but he chose to classify him, in an effort to belittle him, with the untitled multitude. He said that Mr. Nelson was accumulating dollars selling wind and ink to the public, and yet he secretly envied the Professor's mental superiority and his entry into the limited and high rank of scholarly thinkers. Indeed, he had no proper comprehension of American manhood and superiority and supremacy, for he based every order of men below the titled fraternity. He did not know that in the mighty sweep of the ages and the progress of the world, the old system of titles was falling behind, and would have to pass away in the progress of time, as did feudalism, and yield to the newer.

These two men had never met, until they met at Mrs. Spillman's "swell entertainment," but they were conscious for some time that each had a large material being in the world. They knew they were rivals. They naturally could not be friends. Neither had a special de-

sire, or motive born out of pure sweetness, to cultivate intimately the society of the other. In the first instance they were not instinctively congenial.

And Mina knew not the state of unexpressed feeling existing between these rival suitors. Hers was not the hammock-novel spirit of love and jealousy, as she did not harvest that crop of literary weeds, and consequently she was not prepared to imagine that men could have intense feelings of revolt toward each other. She was not a girl who pined in sentimental foolishness and love vagaries about any man, for she was a royal girl of nature, perfect in health, proper in mental attitudes toward the opposite sex, and living because life was a supreme happiness and blessing. Prof. Nelson she knew to be nature's nobleman, and Earl Nero Pensive a legal nobleman. There was a difference in her mind. It was a conceded fact that no man could be as gracious and perfect in manner as was Earl Nero Pensive without possessing a keen, discriminating, ready mind and power of application. The title bore no weight with her, though the Earl inferred it did, and upon that inference he was willing to base his success of winning her in the end. She had to be won by tact and indifference, rather than by fulsome flattery and the unction of persistent attention and pursuit. He recognized her sturdy sense and splendid attainments. These he put in the credit column, opposite her idiosyncrasies, subtile and faint as they might be, which stood upon the debit page. It might be that she had a preference for the Earl for some things and for the Professor for some other things, more excellent and worthy. They might classify her as they listed, that was

a mental affair of their own, and settled nothing definitely as to her unalterable life essence, and she would not be perturbed by it. In fact she had no self-consciousness as to where she was placed by others,—she only wished to be well thought of by everybody.

The unlettered simplicity of her feelings, she sometimes recalled, made life seem less artificial and more divine.

CHAPTER XXI

AS unexpectedly as she departed, Miss I. Single, sobriquet, otherwise Clarissa Harlow, returned to Atlantic City, the day after her friends had gone to Washington.

Information from Dean McBarron, to the effect that he was not recovering very rapidly from his injuries sustained on a windy day in the streets, took her to him in Chicago. Moreover, Mith Gulliver had intimated to her that it was barely possible Nero Pensive was there in desperate search for Dean. Of course, the reader understands that this deception was for the purpose of enticing her there out of Nero Pensive's way, while he should attend Mrs. Spillman's great fete in Washington. It would be, indeed, ugly to be confronted by her on such a social occasion. A woman at bay is a formidable beast to meet anywhere. Then, too, if Nero Pensive was in Chicago seeking Dean McBarron, she knew that if they met a duel would probably follow. It was a part of her duty to keep them quite separate, for disaster to either one would lie at her door, she was well aware. Dean had intimated to her that trouble would ensue should they meet,—a spicy bit of sensation for the newspapers.

She was again with her new-found friends at Atlantic City, a sort of nucleus around which the others cohered.

She seemed to inspire verve and purpose in the rest. There is always a leader in every flock. Why?—

Alice Moore-Greenfield and Miss I. Single, accompanied by Peter Wilkins and Clever Hesperus, in a frolicsome humor one evening, strolled into a "theatorium" or nickleodeon and laughed excessively at the comic motor-pictures. The moving scenes were entertaining, and consisted of tricks put upon susceptible grown-ups by extraordinary precocious boys, chiefly of the type of the yellow kid, a fledgeling of the alley. The gramophone ground out pitiable music.

"I wonder whether there are in very truth people as easy to be imposed on as those represented here," said Clever Hesperus in his marvelously exact manner. He would have imagined himself guilty of a capital offense and ready for execution had he not been correct according to his idea.

"Sure—sure!" reiterated Miss I. Single. Clever Hesperus knew not her real name.

"Yes, quite as dead easy as these in the pictures," said Peter Wilkins, strengthening the general idea of weak people easily imposed upon.

"I found an easy dupe once in New York," said Alice. Miss I. Single looked at her in an aside, which had the effect of a cloture upon Parliament. Alice corrected a recalcitrant lock of hair, as if "fixing" herself to make a beautiful picture on Mr. Wilkins' retina.

"How was that?" Peter urged.

"I sang him a song and he thought it angelic—poor fool!"

"I'm not so barbaric as to quarrel for the absolute cor-

rectness of my view when indeed I *might* be wrong, to be sure, as all men are liable to be, all men and women being fallible, as we understand it, but I'm inclined to think that the fellow was nearer correct about your singing than Miss Moore-Greenfield was," said Clever Hesperus, as near the melancholy comedy as it was possible for him to be.

"My, what a roast!" cried Alice, eyes glistening with laughter and clapping her little white hands, a large diamond flashing from her finger.

"No—no—no! To be angelic—are you not?" stumbling in the lumber of his intellectual attic for a simile that was not to be found.

"A loyal dalliance around the truth is not the very truth itself," said Alice, a solemn smile decorating the angular corners of her face. With erratic impulse she paused and swung her right hand into a heroic position.

"What you doing?" demanded Miss I. Single so rapidly as to skip her verbs.

"Trying something. Don't you see? Giving emphasis to my phrase 'loyal dalliance'. But don't you get educated about it, and set yourself up by your own authority as a most righteous judge to try me for unconventional vagaries, according to the common law of society."

"All—it's all mere speculative delusion,—all you've been saying," said Peter Wilkins oracularly.

"My *Ne-mé-sis* has always been my misfortune," said Clever Hesperus. Peter Wilkins had long said that in the pronunciation of classical names Clever Hesperus "fell down." He pronounced by what he conceived to be logical rules of pronunciation, and therefore he was as correct

as a dictionary and need not verify his accents and sounds, he thought. He always pronounced *Ar-is-to-phanes*, *A-ris-ti-des*, *I-ca-rus*, and even *Mon-tag-ue*. He had read some of the last century novelists, little science, little history, and little political economy, although he had absorbed some trifles of these matters of great human interest in no very accurate manner. It must be said to his credit, and it is a splendid revelation of character to say it of any one, that he was not a stormy-mouthed gentleman of more leisure than learning, or of more exactness than suavity.

"And I never know where I'm at, unless I'm in the furor and dust and storm and roar of a mighty quarrel,—then I'm in my natural element, as a fish in water," said Clarissa, looking askance at Clever Hesperus.

"Nobody's absolutely right," said Alice.

"That's what Lombroso and Nordau say," remarked Peter Wilkins.

"If I may veer a little from this main-traveled road of talk," said Miss I. Single thoughtfully, "I wonder how many little and big grievances at home, could be palliated by 'I beg your pardon,' or 'I was wrong.' Easy, effectual, but hard to say. Pride prohibits yielding, 'I don't care' overrules surroundings, and self-love will not become second in the family row. How easy in the beginning to 'let it go.' When the battle is fought out, let us say, and one is slain and the other badly wounded, what great principle was fought for, what was gained?"

"There should be a domestic Hague in every home," said Peter Wilkins. "And would be were it not for Mr. Ego's supremacy."

"'Let it go,'" said Miss I Single, "is easy, effectual,

good, and brings happiness and final supremacy. It is only a word,—‘beg pardon,’—and the other surrenders and re-veres you. But False Pride and Miss My Rights are great scrappers.”

“How will one help what he is. What I am I am,” said Alice.

“There are two ones in every one,” said Peter Wilkins; “an intellectual and an emotional one, a good and an evil one, a saint and a devil. So it becomes a simple question which one, Dr. Jekyll or Mr. Hyde, you will let represent you, perhaps falsely in either case, for the time being.”

“If I may ‘butt in’ (this is a slang phrase, I beg you all to remark),” said Clever Hesperus, “I think everybody is just what he is, no more and no less.”

“Evidently,” said Peter Wilkins, seeing only the point of his patent leathers.

After a moment, in which the tide of talk almost subsided, Alice abruptly blurted out:

“I move and second, gentlemen and ladies, that we adjourn to meet at once in Washington, and there resume the unfinished business of this meeting.”

“What unfinished business—love?” asked Peter Wilkins, affecting the simple minded.

“I—I—I—it’s unanimous,” cried Miss I. Single with kindling enthusiasm.

“May we not proceed in a joint body to the Capitol city, like Coxey’s army, and if necessary we can respectably petition the President of his country for his own glory’s sake to lend a hearing to our very weighty cause,” amended Alice.

“It seems to me, if I may be allowed to judge in this

exceedingly important matter, that it is a prudent thing to do to carry this unfinished business into the boundaries of its best friends instead of digressing upon it down here by the seashore where the waves have neither emotion nor intellect, according to the philosophy of our mutual friend Peter Wilkins." Clever Hesperus endeavored to look pleased.

An editor whose hastily formed ideas on some topic he has read nothing about, are clear as mud, could not have been guilty of a more exactly involved sentence.

"Shall we move upon the station in force at eleven o'clock to-night, catch the train, and wend our way slowly to Washington?" said Alice still the prime mover in the proposal.

"Agreed," cried all.

And they took that train.

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN they arrived in Washington, a "jolly" quartette as could be, notwithstanding an uncomfortable Mr. Exact made one of the party, the two young ladies were not a little surprised to meet Earl Nero Pen-sive upon the point of entering a railway coach for New York.

With extreme presumption Clarissa Harlow, alias Miss I. Single, approached him, after having dismissed her friends peremptorily and freakishly with the remark that she could be found at the Ebbitt any time. She was serious beyond all custom, and all wondered yet respected her dismissal of herself. It was evident she had approached a crisis. Alice "tore open her eyes,"—that was all. Clever Hesperus approached an astonished look.

Hitherto Nero had avoided Clarissa. And she had been seeking him. It was her exceeding good fortune to meet him. He was greatly confused, like a felon when the court passes sentence upon him. It was most unfortunate for him to meet her there—there of all places. If Alice Moore-Greenfield had not been present. He seemed to understand Clarissa Harlow's movement upon him in all its details. He knew her only by this name. He was dragooned into patient submission. His politeness was his undoing in this instance, and he restrained his impression

to flee because it would have been undignified and contrary to courtly rule.

Clarissa did not smile when she hurried down the platform toward him. She moved with awakened step and non-readable face. He startled when he saw her hastening to intercept him, and when she came up he looked sharply into her eyes. Neither longer observed the throng of people hurrying to and fro. He had hitherto been almost always able to approximate her thoughts in the variations of the marvelous curves at the corners of her mouth; and now he saw threatening shadows there. He did not fear her—it was the probable public scene.

And he, a titled lord, regarded it a matter of impertinence to be questioned as to his purposes, motives, or deeds. He owed no confession to any man or any authority, and Clarissa's impossible demeanor was construed as an assault, and therefore according to the laws of war he was compelled to take the defensive. He was prepared for war before a single gun had been fired or he was asked to surrender. Emotions are quicker to respond than intellect. No guilty man is at ease where exposure is possible. And now he was confronted with what he had long been shunning.

She had not, he thanked his graces, offered the sensational story to the press. But now publicity seemed inevitable. He was stared at by ugly looking possible conditions. But one is never the victim of a Bull Run till after the battle.

As Clarissa approached, with glaring white teeth and intense conviction she said:

"How do you do, sir?" She courtesied with the proper

angle of an English lady. Her round pearl dark eyes had commanded the nymphs of peace to retire. He saw therein the eagles of war.

"I have no reason to reprobate you," he answered, "and will not without reason. You, I am persuaded, think you have reasons for maligning me at will, but that is your mere mental attitude."

"You grow very deliberately philosophical, where feelings, the whole sum and substance of life, are so vitally concerned."

"Let us not misunderstand."

"We will not, can not, do not misunderstand, Nero Pensive."

"I trust, Miss Clarissa Harlow—"

"This from you, Nero Pensive!"

Alice now came up. Her dismissal was void, when she saw her friend likely to be in need of her. She had recognized the man to whom Clarissa was talking. She said with hauteur and reproachful voice:

"Mr. Ron Cornwallis, I—." She knew no other name for him. She had not the faintest symptom of a desire to meet him, but on the other hand felt timid and insecure, recollecting the attempted kidnapping.

Clarissa turned with large, wondering eyes, fairly discrediting her ears, and interrupted Alice:

"Girl, what do you say!"

Alice was astonished at the peremptoriness and animation of Clarissa. She had a vision. Had Clarissa not confided all in her. Had she discovered something! What could her attitude mean!

Clarissa was horrified to discover that Nero Pensive

and Ron Cornwallis were one and the same person, and that he is the one Alice had married without becoming his wife.

The culprit stood there very composed, awaiting the clarification of the minds of these two frivolous, "smart" Americans. He was an Englishman, and he felt perfectly secure in that fact. He said not a word. It was not for him to speak. He owed no explanations or apologies to any one, and so words would be unwise, undiplomatic. The "women had the floor." He would deny all knowledge of Alice, even both, if necessary and shout "blackmail." He was by no means entirely at the mercy of infuriated beasts, like a matador. He had a fine fighting chance for his life.

"I called him Ron Cornwallis. What do you call him? And who knows who he is?" said Alice in inflections that stabbed.

It was not high-toned or rutable to change his name, but when an "easy little young American girl," the smartest women of the world, proposed a "lark" he was her *mouton*, and it was merely a part of the romantic "lark" to alter his name. The genuine Nero Pensive could not act the undignified part that Ron Cornwallis did.

"This man! This is Nero Pensive," said Clarissa decisively and bitterly.

"Nero Pensive!"

"Yes."

"It's Ron Cornwallis!"

"They are both this one man," said Clarissa.

"Impossible!"

"He's the man you married. I never suspected he was

the man." Clarissa turned full to him, as if demanding a vocal expression from his grace-annointed lips,—lying lips, nevertheless. He cared not what she demanded.

"I never dreamed they were the same. Nero Pensive you had made me well familiar with, as I had you with Ron Cornwallis. I repudiated the mental egotist when the words were scarcely cold that united us, I escaped his kidnapping, and now I discover his duplicity. The fellow seems defective in that which makes for excellent, I X L manhood."

"As you are delinquent in that which makes for the femininity of a Griselda," said he stirred to the quick. His cold words breathed the frost of Septentriones and his voice was as soulless as the wind. This return to Alice was a winged arrow that wounded. But healed,—healed the girl of her emotional defects. For the first time in life she saw herself as others saw her. She was shocked at the picture.

"I have more things in the olio against you," said Clarissa directly to him.

"I have no objection to that," he said in the effort to smile and represent his retort as smart or witty.

"It boots me not to hear your indifference," said Clarissa.

"I'm neither hot nor cold, neither up nor down, because of your mind or emotion in the matter," said he, "and your words have no force in altering or directing my course," he said coldly, calmly, flatly, impudently.

"Perhaps you remember Paris, and the attraction of a

certain wealthy American, named Mina Wadsworth," said Clarissa trenchantly.

He did not answer. The train he had intended to go away on escaped at this moment, he observed. This fact perturbed him less than his tyrannical, unsubduable, insubordinate feelings. But his smooth exterior belied his actual inner state. His attitude, voice, and words were classically correct.

He glanced after his train now going away, and took two steps to convey his disarranged purpose.

"I bid you good day, ladies," bowing considerately to them. He went out and took a cab.

Peter Wilkins and Clever Hesperus regarded the whimsical conduct of the girls, in running away after a stranger, as a matter of no concern to them. The man might be a brother or an old lover. At some point sooner or later the girls would vouchsafe some sort of explanation of their conduct, in apology for so unceremonious treatment. So they departed from the station without delay.

Clarissa sprang into a cab, bade Alice get in too, and directed the driver to follow the first cab.

Nero had anticipated this movement, and in fact saw both girls enter a cab. He had directed his driver to let him out at the Capitol. This was done. He walked up the steps and stood on the top watching the other cab stop. Then he entered the rotunda and waited, thinking he would easily circumvent these inexperienced young American girls.

But Clarissa proceeded not in the line of his suppositions. She called a patrolman, gave him money, and told

him to shadow her and Alice. They next entered the rotunda, and barely saw Nero turn to the left and disappear. Then she instructed the patrolman to "run that man down" and report to her at the Ebbitt as speedily as possible. It would be big money for him not to miss the man.

They returned and took the cab and disappeared, very much to Nero's satisfaction. He would not run into that swarm of bees again, not while his sanity could be relied upon. He had easily and successfully eluded them, nay outwitted them, and with no deep scheming to effect it. An inner pleasure filled the decayed moral cells of his heart as his mind resurveyed the whole incident and drew the conclusion that he was in no serious immediate danger. It was possible to dodge even well-willed women. He schemed with big eyes, speaking figuratively.

To confess the truth he was not prepared to meet both of them at once, and the complications that had arisen unforeseen rendered it wholly inadvisable for him to claim and carry away the wife of his New York banter. Hereafter he would deny her, since Nero Pensive never knew her,—it was Ron Cornwallis. He certainly would not be dragooned into any complications with these two unconscionable young ladies, nor would he be an outraged party to the American stand-and-deliver sort of love making. In honest language, at that moment this whole American imbroglio had a bitter taste about it, if indeed it was not surcharged with a real affliction. There was an easier way out of it than the brutal Brutus method, and that was a return to mother country. But that smacked somewhat of the baby act.

But he would see. He was not compromised yet as an Englishman, whatever the American system of casuistry might be. Not to be ungallantly, stupidly brusque, he was not going to be "cornered" by two frolicksome, feather-weight, idle-hearted American girls, even if the great, impersonal public did rave over the perfection of beauty of both and praise them as marvels of sweetness and love. Of course they are both rich in a limited sense, but they are not able to "match dollars" with Miss Wadsworth. Dollars were what he wanted, not the heiress or the beauty, or the public commendation accorded her—dollars, cold "almighty dollars."

It was early morning, shortly after the great social gathering given by Mrs. Spillman, when Nero was intercepted by the arrival of Clarissa and Alice. He was extricating himself, for one thing, from the social tangle precipitated by this function, and, for another, was proceeding to meet Mith Gulliver, who had communicated to him that he had some knowledge of Dean McBarron. And it was vastly important that he and his henchman should consult together in New York at once and decide on future action. But now he would defer his going for a day, and if possible "have a definite understanding" with Miss Mina Wadsworth, the financially valuable lady. The unforeseen arrival of the other two ladies made this conclusion imperative. Exposure must be forestalled. Exposure is a monstrous Griffin. Exposure unsettles, undoes things ruthlessly. It was easy to inform Mith of the delay.

He sat down a moment to plan further and decide on his course. He was confident that the grand stage beauty had not been definitely repressed by the present elusion, and he

knew she would confront him again, perhaps to better purpose than before, at some most unhappy moment, to be sure. He knew something of the determination of this stage star, who had sent a thrill throughout Europe, and it was necessary to settle matters definitely before she could defeat him with uncanny personal reports. Nevertheless, self-assurance confided to him that he would "win out" in the long run. There was not the shadow of a doubt in his begrimed intellect that she was on his trail for the single purpose of circumventing him and defeating his purpose to marry the Ex-Senator's valuable daughter. Do as she would he had determined that she should not block his way, for money was a prime necessary article now for him. He must have it at all hazards, and more he would. Still it was indeed truly necessary for him to be diligent in the case, and therefore he would press the matter home to her this very afternoon. He would not telephone to Miss Wadsworth, lest she plead previous engagement, but he would do the better thing by calling on her unannounced.

One of the ugly complexities in the affair was the unfortunate and unwelcome presence of the two girls, Clarissa and Alice, and particularly Alice. It had occurred to him that he might, first thing, persuade them to leave the city with him, but on second consideration that became highly improbable. And if he should, that would not rectify the probable results from causes already set in motion.

Meantime, the detective shadowing him went to the Ebbitt hotel to make report to Clarissa and Alice. He had very easily traced the Earl to his hotel, the Arlington, and there he was informed he had been since Mrs. Lena Spill-

man's great social function. He was not an ambassador from some other country, nor connected in any way with an embassy, though he seemed to be a man of some distinction. He could not learn whether he was a mere traveler here or a man of business. He thought it probable he was a man of broad concerns. He was not an American, of that the sleuth was sure, at all events. It was highly probable he was some great foreigner traveling incognito.

Clarissa added money to his itching palm, thanked him, sent him away declaring profusely he would be proud to render her any other service she might deign to put into his ready hands. She had rewarded him munificently for his brief service, and consequently he was graciously disposed to heap fulsome thanks upon her proportionate to the reward. But at present she had no further need of his succor. His dismissal was final.

She had already decided upon what was the immediate thing for her to do, and that decision formed the next step was less difficult.

CHAPTER XXIII

“**I** HEARTILY and sincerely beg your unqualified pardon for the distressful discourtesy of coming unheralded, uninvited, and even without your knowledge, but untoward circumstances, I beg to assure you in extenuation of my unwarranted conduct, have been the sole reason for this massive breach of gentility.” His utterance seemed to lend force to words that they did not possess intrinsically. He bowed very low as he stood in Miss Wadsworth’s open door at three p. m. She received him in her newest gown, as it happened, and with her friendliest smile, or if not that at least one the critical world of society would not impeach. His ready, sharp, gray eyes did not fail to catch the social gleam upon her ebullient, poetic, rose-bud young lips. And her sparkling brown eyes, a true gauge of the spirit that looked out through them, shed a singular light upon him. She offered her hand high up in welcome, as the present custom is, and he clasped her fingers’ ends in a perfunctory manner. He was not cognizant of the sense she received as their fingers touched, or connected as do magnetic poles. The slight touch threw a cordon of guards around her, and set the motion or gate of her mental pace. His face was a dead, faded photograph, of an indescribable essence behind.

“I deem an apology unnecessary,” she replied, of course.

What else could she say and not be rude, which is more to be reprobated than a "white lie."

"It gives me extreme happiness to have this assurance," he insisted. She caught the perfunctory note in it, just as you do, friendly reader.

She requested him to enter, and led the way into the luxuriously furnished room. He sat down in the chair indicated. The soft air of wealthy comfort appealed to him, and he reflected that such luxuries were his by right of birth. It is conceded, as a point in his favor, that he had the grace not to talk about himself, a rare trait in most people; for with them the richest and best and only worth-while article on earth is *self*.

"I was just going for my friend Olive Pendell, and we were going to have a little outing. Will you accompany us, or shall I invite her by telephone to call here with us?" Shrewd girl!

Could anything have been more fortunate, or less fortunate,—fortunate outing with her, unfortunate that there was to be a third party. That common folk saying stole across the frowning horizon of his mental vision: "Two is company and three is a crowd."

"Have you promised Miss Pendell to 'drop by' for her?"

"Yes."

"May we not take a jaunt, or brief swing about Arlington Heights before calling for her?" he requested.

"Yes."

Why did she say that! Her evil angel was in the ascendant to-day. She flung uncomplimentary epithets at

herself for that "yes." But it was in her to taunt him. His hand-touch was the immediate cause.

They were speeding through Georgetown on the way from the city, and he took it that his one opportunity above all others had come. He began:

"This is, I take it, the time for unfinished business, to be considered at this adjourned meeting. I trust there will be no opposition methods of obstruction. I refer to the bill of love introduced in the House, numbered, read, discussed, and deferred till the subsequent meeting."

"Beg your pardon—it was laid on the table."

"Then you must have been the mover," he said.

"And you the seconder," she said with gaudy composure and dignity.

"Then I move to take the bill from the table. It is so ordered," he jested.

"The mover must ask the vote to take the bill from the table," she said.

"Or the seconder, according to Read's Rules of Order," he amended.

"Then I vote to send the bill back to the committee to be amended, corrected, and reconsidered in the committee room," she laughed.

"The motion is out of order."

And so on they jested till the chauffeur was carrying them up the hill to the level of the heights, where a portion of the army encamped during the Spanish-American war. They were together in the rear seat, and he was centering not only a pensive gray eye upon her but an in-

tense purpose. She could not know from his bland manner how close to the evil of desperation he was.

"Will you give me the sweet and rare privilege of calling you *my dear*?"

"If I could be sure of the meaning you put in the phrase 'my dear.' "

She had heard of English male dominance and brow-beating of wives, and she distrusted his words. She would give them their American signification, and he would give them their English meaning, no doubt; and these meanings differed if experience was to be accepted in interpretation.

"Why, surely all that the words bear in them, all the lexicographers give them, all you and I put into them, 'and then some.' That's what I mean." He seemed to have scored a point.

"No reservations?"

"None!"

"Believe me, sir, I'm not hesitating, or dallying like a moth around a light, or playing fast and loose with you. I should dispise myself for such unladylike conduct. My mind is clear. I'm not a jester, or a tease, but—"

"Nay, nay, let me urge my cause; let me plead it as for my life; let me argue it as an advocate before a jury for the life of a prisoner; let me place my heart as it were a burnt sacrifice upon an altar; let me repeat every fond word I have so long cherished for you; let me implore upon bended knees for a bit of charity for the faithful and great love I bear for you; let me swear it before high heaven in the presence of all the saints and angels; let me repeat every secret imagination of my heart, every sweet dream with you as the central figure, every lovely hope I have cher-

ished, every fond fancy of the future; let me say what I shall say with my last breath,—that no one is to me what you are; no one who means so much; no one so necessary to my life; no one so competent—”

“I think I understand,” she broke in. “I can not doubt such charming asseverations. They are strong, if not windy; literary, if not meaningless. They are too strong and suggest a weak cause.”

“No—no!” His eyes had in them a strange mixture of flash and reprimand. “No! O, this great America that trains even the ladies in nescience—in love infidelity. Indeed, I’m most candid, shall I say it in clear American candor, most desperately in earnest in what I have said. Between me and the objects I look upon, I frankly confess, your sweet vision intervenes, and I’m sometimes accused, on account of it, of raw abstraction and crude violation of the social canons. Believe me, let me pray, I’m telling you the cause of a soul in down-pressing desperation. You will not ‘throw me down.’ You will take time to consider. You will not be uncomplimentary and answer before you have considered the appeal I have made and the need of justice for me.”

“We Americans believe in justice for both sides. For there is no quarrel or love affair that does not concern two people, at the very least, and not infrequently many more.”

“Pray, consider me. I do not want to become mean in your eyes by being meanly humble and undignified in the humility and pitiable pleadings of my fallible speech and too zealous heart; but I would be, were it necessary to reach your heart and be in it the alpha and omega, the be all and end all.”

"Pray, be easy. I'm considering your pleadings,—in *my* way, not *yours*, of course. The right of the wife to private judgment is not denied in my great land, and the daughter enjoys the same privileges of the mother. And I've no desire to have you make a fool of yourself and a laughing stock and a joke in my youthful circle, nor myself to be the flattered recipient of your fine speeches,—which you know the worth of better than I do,—but I shall not deny you the opportunity of expressing your fine words and fancy-fetched sentiments, if that is any pleasure to you. I'm not innately mean, if I do seem so." She half laughed at her mock seriousness. The whole matter would persist in taking the character of *gaucherie*. There was a latent humor about it that came up before her like a court fool.

"There's something in your manner,
There's something in your smile,
There's something seems to tell me
You're just my style."

He hummed this in a good, full, baritone vocalization, and nodded to her every time he pronounced the word "*your*." He could accent his smile with a catholic grace, despite the faint line at the corners of his eyes and the thinning hair upon his temples. This sudden gush into song made his sentimental effort at love making seem farcical and a by play to her, and thence forward she could read in his words nothing but jest or comedy.

As far away from his theme as possible, yet not to seem abrupt or abstract and unconcerned, which would have been politely condemnatory of her, she said:

"This is an outdoor age for boys and girls, and for outdoor love, parlor love being obsolescent, if not antiquated, and I wonder how the future homes will be affected by this variation of love making."

"Do you ask me what your home would be? Just what you would make it," he answered promptly enough to have the appearance of zealousness and honesty.

"You would have no hand in helping to make it beautiful for love and situation?"

"O, yes, indeed," bending his head and looking out archly from under his eyes, an act that did not become him, though he imagined it was eminently original with him.

"You'd help to make it, how?"

"The sweetest paradise on earth, with the only angel on earth in control of this domestic haven of unalloyed happiness."

"Well spoken, indeed."

"And so meant."

"Meanings, let me say, do not always tally with facts," she observed in a tone that caused his jubilant spirits to fall some forty degrees below the temperate or self-comfortable point. She was an enigma. Or was he an impulse with which she was flirting, if not smiling at, and tolling on to some unforeseen anti-climax. But—he must "be good."

"But what do you say to my proposition to form an alliance by treaty and unite our hearts and interests?"

They were returning, and had almost reached Georgetown, when the automobile stopped. The chauffeur found on examination that the gasoline had given out.

Thirteen chattering, laughing, grimy-faced urchins, tak-

ing it as a huge joke, pushed the machine into Georgetown. That was by far the best entertainment they had enjoyed for a long time. The street gamins caught the full humor of the situation, and they, of course, got out of it all there was in it. Even Mina and Nero fell into the feeling that was predominant at the moment, and laughed in unison.

She simply said in answer to his last grave and all-important question, closing all further discussion for the moment:

"I cannot answer you now or here."

"I beseech, I hope not with self-humiliating, maudlin beseechment, tell me then where I may next present my claim."

His persistence had the flattery of seriousness in it. He certainly meant something of what he had uttered with such marvelously well-feigned sincerity and enthusiasm.

"Like at a barber shop you must take your chances," she persisted in disconcerting jocularly.

"This evening?"

"You are the arbiter of your own time, and the architect of your own fortune."

"This evening."

Of course the ramble over the country with Olive was now entirely out of the question.

Clarissa Harlow was still able to make it most uncomfortable for Nero Pensive. His splendid bit of word architecture had all to be rehearsed again to Miss Wadsworth. It was incomprehensible, how she was acting.

CHAPTER XXIV

EX-SENATOR Wadsworth and Prof. Nelson were departing from the White House, when they came upon Peter Wilkins and Clever Hesperus, just arrived in the city from Atlantic City.

The ex-Senator and the Professor had been in close and private conference with President Roosevelt, and it was understood that Prof. Nelson would accept an appointment as the head of a monetary commission to England, France, and Germany, the time for the work not specified, except a limit beyond which the report must not be deferred. The fact of the consultation with President Roosevelt was understood to be no particular secret, but it is regarded as a courtesy to the Chief Executive not to give out information without his knowledge and consent, in matters in which he is directly concerned.

But Peter Wilkins and Clever Hesperus knew the object of the interview, and also knew that the two men had been invited to meet and confer with him. And yet if no information was volunteered, of course it was not for them to introduce the subject and apply the "pump." That would be quite proper for newspaper men to do. So the four men, after first greetings and necessary queries, walked together upon Pennsylvania avenue toward the Capitol, and in the direction in the main of the ex-Senator's home.

"Some men," said Peter Wilkins, at a proper interval in the conversation, a look of the crude comic in his over-shaped face and puzzling eyes, "some men are wonderfully great, if their names appear in programs and in timid interviews in the papers; and should a rough-hewn cut come out in the body of the interview—fame!"

"I well understand," said the Professor, a sane twinkle in his bright eyes.

"Always present company, etc.," observed Peter practically in apology. This opened up the ex-Senator, and he said:

"In these our days of graft and caucusses and 'slates,' it is not a matter for serious wonder that there are political degenerates. Many men of conspicuous privileges are missing their opportunities; and the disgraceful disclosures are a matter of shame, not alone for the acutely guilty but for the sad fact that average American character is unable to meet the trial of exceptional privileges and temptations. And we unsmirched are no better in character than the men under fire, and perhaps would be as guilty given the same opportunity. Even editors, as I have evidence to know, are venal; and we have too few men in control of the press like Horace Greely, Murat Halstead, Henry Watterson, Samuel Bowles, Whitelaw Reid, R. A. Dana, and many others, men whose views have assisted in shaping the policies and destiny of the country. Now this is not a mere chance curbstone opinion, and is not immature and hasty."

"I for my part believe in the men of our day," said the exact Clever Hesperus, "but I don't believe, I make

bold to assert, in campaigns of bitter vituperation, or in brass-band campaigns."

"Perhaps the gum-shoe-sneak campaign, or front-door step campaign, or the campaign of education," resumed the ex-Senator, "is no better method of informing the masses on the issues of the day, without party prejudice, than the loudest, most disorderly, most rowdyish, most musical campaign. This raking with a pessimists' muck-rake, as the President aptly phrased it, into the political scrapheaps of either party is not honest, and it is even less honest to appeal to class-consciousness for votes. The man who will do that is to be mistrusted, even though bearing gifts. To be sure the base drum and fife, and the flag-draped platform in front of an old colonial portico are inspiring but not very informing; and it's intelligence that is supposed to vote."

"Now, I look upon Bryan, a very eminent man in some ways," said Peter Wilkins perhaps a little tartly, "as simply a battered, splintered battering-ram that hammers and is hammered in return. Great men, let me say it in bated breath, are 'excessively scarce,' and statesmanship is out of fashion to-day."

"It occurs to me," said the Professor in staid but staple terms, "that our old earth needs a President of all the nations,—a President of the world; that is to say a Peace President; and I declare no man on earth fitter for that place than our own President Roosevelt."

"Perhaps you will readily meet with a great many seconds to that idea," said Peter Wilkins enthusiastically. "No man would more heartily second it than I myself."

"I have no hesitancy, allow me to say, in saying I

know of no man better fitted for the place than the gentleman named," said the marvelous Clever Hesperus.

"The man who stands next to John Hay in a statesman-like grasp of the vital interests of this country is William H. Taft," said ex-Senator Wadsworth, "and we will better understand the truth of this the farther away we recede from the present. Mr. Taft is a man who will grow with age."

These three men were generously pressed to dine with the hospitable Ex-Senator, who had not put off his kindness for social stilt when he removed from the country to the Capitol City. They consented when refusal would seem impolite if not crude.

Mrs. Wadsworth, ever the inseparable friend of her husband, and her lovely daughter, intelligent, unaffected, queenly, so directed the servants that the dinner was almost a feast. The Ex-Senator was ever a generous liver and a hospitable and companionable host. They had a chef, whom Mrs. Wadsworth designated her household prime minister, and whom Mina called the kitchen premier or prince of the domestic cabinet; and he was sufficient in himself and a pleasure to their home. They entertained in royal style, and to be on their list of invited guests was a social distinction craved by all. Mrs. Wadsworth had great, modest good sense, and she presided at their social functions in such happy manner as not only to seem good and noble but also very ladylike, dignified, and complaisant.

"I've no sort of respect for the idle life," continued the profuse and irrepressible Peter Wilkins, the incroyable but not a macaroni.

"O, haven't you?" cried Mina with the downward inflection on the last word, the ultimate of the sentence.

"None, I assure you,—none in the least. Too many of them would be dangerous, and there is danger in multitudes."

"People at watering resorts have long been laughed at for their idleness. It is said that their lives are frivolous—not serious. They are simply 'having a good time,' a loafing time, a droning time." Mina was laughing.

"Bum life," interjected Peter Wilkins, in imitation of solemnity that might be mistaken for the real. "Bum life, flirting, angling, dressing, objectless, purposeless—faultless, if whimsicality is left out of the count."

"A beautiful season of refreshing, I should say, if I spoke the germ of my somewhat limited experience," said Clever Hesperus.

"I should say, at a venture, it is a theatre of love and tragedy," remarked Prof. P. Thomas Nelson. "Most people there carry on a dual mental process. The one expresses the Dr. Jekyll and the other Mr. Hyde, which is nothing more than mental reservations and suppressions. Even when one speaks, declaring openly he is plain and outspoken, perhaps thinking he is open and frank, he is deceived. He is not giving out *all* he thinks. And he may utter a certain thought that arises—flattery, maybe—and at the same instant hold back a monstrous criticism. While speaking thus he may boldly look you in the eye and note other secrets of your nature to find fault with. And is this reservation dishonest, hypocritical? Or is it mercy, charity, kindness, politeness, wisdom?"

"I think, Professor, your statement, though sweeping, is

correct in the main, making allowances for variations in different natures," observed Mina, smiling upon all, a sort of omnibus smile as a hostess' duty. She was pleased to have this public opportunity of expressing a concert of opinion with him.

The next moment Prof. Nelson approached her, and invited her to the shade of the splendid denizen of the forest, now segregated from his kind and standing alone and solitary in the Ex-Senator's ample yard in the midst of a bustling, busy, booming, throbbing city. The rest entered the smokeroom, and while discussing the "weed" considered Barrie's "Nicotine."

As Mina and the Professor sat upon the rustic seat beneath the magnificent and sheltering arms of the noble old Roman of the primeval forest, while the evening shadows stealthily deepened over the city, the Professor said, timidly but impressively and evidently profoundly serious:

"I'm on my imaginary knees confessing to you what has long been in my heart a secret that has made me unhappily happy, and I'm not asking pardon or forgiveness from my confessor, but I'm asking whether she is equally a guilty accomplice with me. Need I define more specifically?"

"I—think—"

"No. I've bungled this awfully. I do not ask you an incriminating question. I did not mean to do so. But pray tell me, that I am not obtruding my love and making myself not only disagreeable to you but objectionable. O, I wish you to know, know in all its depth and length and breadth and height, the measurements of my long-concealed love for you. I trust I have not mistaken or misjudged my cause, and I beg that you will hear without ob-

jection what I have long intimated to you in so many small ways."

"I can not doubt your honesty, or that you have uttered the sincere sentiments of your heart; but—"

"O, can you use *buts* in this case! I had hoped I had not read you wrongly, or mistranslated your emotional attitude, nor read into the lines what was not there, and I can not yet think I have loved so fondly, with every vibration of my soul element, and that it has been without a response from your soul magnet. I shall never cease to think you could see where I have stood all along, and that you tolerated my attitude without giving me an intimation at some point or other that I was mistaken in your divine afflatus status. There is a secret thought, unexpressed and inexpressible in vocal language, that is sure and faithful and never misleading, in the heart of every one, and that often speaks when least expected, and that thought in you never repulsed me and said I was laboring under a delusion and that I was obtruding myself on an innocent heart. I have not at any time found reasons, however subtle or the opposite, that interdicted my loving you, and loving you with a sincerity and fervency that should affect my whole after life. O, I grow garrulous upon this matter, but what tongue would not plead for its life and all there is in life,—for the love of a girl of so supreme excellence. You are very patient to hear me through, and that is entirely non-translatable to me."

He took her hand and she did not object. He pressed it between both of his. His eyes glowed with the intense fervency of his soul that seemed to be inditing a good mat-

ter. His tongue was ready but it did not ramble or speak vagaries.

She was reserved, modest, impressed. Her eyes, in the declining light of day, did not seek his, for she needed no ocular proof. Her sense of it all was clear and sufficient. She felt the truth; and she was not mistaken.

She was impressed with the glory of a love so noble and unskillful. It was the pure and undefiled and uncontaminated and uncontaminating love of a man of marked scholarship and general superiority, and she knew that he would not be satisfied with evasion, though he might not insist on an immediate categorical answer. She was confident how she felt in the matter, and had a sufficiently definite line of thought to make clear her position toward him. It was a clear conviction in her mind that she had not been recreant to his tentative, subtile advances from time to time, nor had she treated indifferently his slight, pointed attentions on many occasions. This might be ground for self-condemnation or self-gratulation, as the case might be. However, in a general estimate his conduct seemed less an evidence of love than a mark of admiration for her, as a young lady nearer to his liking than the generality of them. His attentions seemed to have more of an impersonal character than of a love intent. Upon the whole she could not think she had held out encouragement, nor discouragement. Be it remarked, she was not disposed to find fault with herself for her course toward him, nor to commend herself.

"I have no desire to evade the issue you have presented," she said gravely, agitatedly, but without withdrawing her hand. It was impossible to lift her twinkling, almost tear-suffused brown eyes from the roses that seemed to labor on

her bosom, where they lay imprisoned with a pin. They had a frank confession in them. Not that she was ashamed of the confession, or that it would signify weakness, but because it did not seem to be the moment for disclosure.

“Pardon me—thanks! I may rejoice when the issue is not offensive to you. I would at once retire were it repellent to you. I trust that this old subject of love, threshed out over and over and over again by men and women ever since Adam made love to good mother Eve in the Garden, but new to you and me, is as marvelous and grand and supreme and divine and binding and obligating and all in all in our hearts as God meant it to be. I hope we may—O, I can’t avoid the *we!*—my destiny is linked with yours, however far apart our destinies may be cast. My love is firm and pure, and I trust God-sanctioned and humanly speaking God-sanctified, and what it is, little or much, all, I give you. Love capacities, of course, vary in size, but yet all love to their utmost limit, but not in equal amounts. When each one is exercised to its full extent, it conceives it excels all others God ever formed—a natural conclusion though not necessarily a correct one. I can not help arguing. It is my ruling passion. But you see now how I view my case at present. I see everything on earth with fond eyes and appealing heart. In the midst of all things,—O, this is not fulsome, I hope,—I have you placed the triumphant queen,—the queen of my heart, hope, love, destiny, all!”

“My faith in your words is unimpeachable, my secret self admires your engaging candor, my trust in your honor and genuineness is rather enhanced, and I must ex-

press my great appreciation of the honor you do me in confessing so manly, so noble, so genuine a love for me— O words will not arise to do justice to the occasion. Let me see—

“ ‘Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.’ ”

It was a significant fact that she “dropped into” poetry. After that his doubts became panic stricken and were utterly routed.

“There’s something noble in love, the greatest divine gift of God to man. It’s all for love this world goes on. God’s plan from the beginning embraced, as the greatest of all his works, the beautiful, supreme element or faculty of love, and he put upon its exercise, as he did upon all his great gifts to man, the guard of the law of moderation. The extravaganza of emotion, and the rapture of impulse, are ephemeral, passing, and such love is perishable, evanescent, fickle, frail. But as I understand it, all love is a thing of sensation, emotion, feeling, and that which dominates the intellectual is but the will of the wind, unstable as water, as unsatisfactory as evanescent, altering with every new face, not desirable.”

He glowed in his earnestness of expression. He felt himself to be in the golden light upon the heights, though the shadows of evening were deepening. He was exalted to the seventh heaven. And yet she had said nothing positive. He was projecting an interpretation into her

attitude, and the reading was simply that of his own lively hope. But how could it be otherwise!

"I see no cause or loophole for disagreement with you upon the supreme element of love," she said calmly, but she was excited, though unwilling to confess it to herself. "In fact, I desire not to disagree with the absolute facts of nature, physical or metaphysical. But there is an art in making love, I'm sure you will confess."

Her experiences this day gave origin to this latter thought. He had dropped her hand.

"Nature is true art. There may be a cultivated art," he said in less love-lit, love-charged tones and more within the domain of pure logic, "and I think the heart can easily discriminate between the two. I hope you do not think I've been using the artifice of cultivated art to tell you what good tidings of good I have long stored secretly in my heart. I had no peace as long as I kept it sneakily concealed there—the best thing God gives to men—concealed out of sight of every one."

"Need I explain my meaning—to you?" she said, a deep meaning lurking back in her intonation, and not a condemnatory one. She turned her beautiful, full, speaking brown eyes upon him, as if to convey a special meaning by the act of her glance as well as by the glance itself. And yet she was not practicing the cunning of delay or deception. She was honest in her manner, and the honesty was not of the transient type that is forgotten in the next emotional soul movement.

"To be sure I could not be sure, and hence I took the clew and followed the inference. If I was wrong, I am glad and sorry both—glad that I was mistaken, and

sorry that I mistook you. But, I have it in my full heart to say, that I'm on the eve of going to Europe, commissioned by the government, and I could not leave my native land without knowing my fate in advance."

"To Europe! How soon?"

It pleased him to see her surprise.

"In no very far-off date. That we will go very soon, in a few days, is understood at present."

"Will you remain long?"

She was interested, perhaps more than the simple interest of mere surprise. This was a straw. She had not unequivocally told him yet what she thought of him. However, without words she had revealed something, though not designing to do so. In this manner she had said she held him in great esteem at all events, he was not a worthless love-scoundrel, sitting on the muck-heaps of passion, dwelling in the realm of evil thoughts continually.

"My stay will depend upon the difficulty of obtaining the facts we are sent after. But I anticipate no delay beyond the ordinary."

"A year?"

"Possibly, though we hope not."

"Then I may see you on the other Atlantic shore. We may go over in early December for the rest of the winter."

"That will be a joy to me,—I trust. May I hope all I have in my heart to hope? May I dream sweet dreams in my solitude in the multitude? May I still think the noblest things of my fancy about Miss Mina Wadsworth, the one woman who is to me what no other ever can be,

the one woman my heart goes out for as the only thing desirable on earth—may I?”

“I have—”

A servant came inopportunately and announced the call of Nero Pensive. It was dark, though the electric lights quite removed the obsession of night. They were not aware that daylight had been obliterated and artificial light substituted, so engrossed had they been.

She arose.

“Let us go in,” she said.

“May I write?”

“I will be delighted.”

“And will you tell me on paper, since you’ve been denied the full privileges of the tongue, the truthful and exact status of your heart in this matter? Or is it important enough to you to carry in your mind and heart at all,—at least to a point where it can influence you to command yourself to write?”

“I will write,” as they hurried into the house.

CHAPTER XXV

MINA was careful to give Nero no positive encouragement to renew his appeal, interrupted in the afternoon.

It was not possible for her to attach the same weight to his addresses that she did to the Professor's. And yet the man possessed evident virtues, as shown in his masterful civilities and cultivated graceful attentions. Away from him she could "measure him up" as he is, or as he seemed really to be to her; but in his suave presence her previous opinions of him became problematic assumptions, scarcely shrewd guesses. As already stated a time or two, something—something dragged her back from him, as it were, and notwithstanding this telepathic warning he seemed to be a juggernaut that she could throw herself under and be crushed by. But her better sense informed her that this feeling of submission was in no wise safe or trustworthy,—rather it was to be regarded as a warning or symptom of something one should shun as decidedly disastrous, deceiving.

Nero had already seated himself and was stiffly conversing with the ex-Senator, Peter Wilkins and Clever Hesperus, when Mina entered accompanied by the Professor. This was a signal surprise to him, and he broke out into silent curses to himself, while smiling the handsomest upon both as he respectfully greeted them. Some-

how Mina saw the Faust in his face as he saluted her. She was then glad he had seen the Professor in her confidential company.

Instantly and instinctively the Chinese puzzle of the situation revolved itself clearly in her mind. Her decision was formed the moment after she entered the room.

So as soon as convenient she invited Nero Pensive and Peter Wilkins to accompany her to the greenhouse, where she would request them to examine some orchidaceous plants that pleased her very much. The surprising invitation was as unintelligible and profound to Peter Wilkins as Lamaism, and as whimsical to Nero Pensive as a Gibson girl that can not be translated into every-day life.

They followed, a profoundly deceptive jocularly in their manner, but willing victims of the deception. They would wait to read the immediate future of the next hour as it should transpire. They were sure they would be actors in the comedy.

The girl was an enigma to Nero, and Peter had no theory concerning her, for he no sooner settled upon what he supposed her to be in *esse* than she, by some strange revelation of herself as he supposed, at once confounded all his well fortified analyses of her. Notwithstanding she had firmly declined to go under the mask of Wilkins all her life, she nevertheless had not aroused vicious elements in his nature that would be revenged tenfold but had instead won his fonder, better friendship that would never die and that would do her any favor in his power to confer.

She pointed out her orchids, and related the circumstances of Mrs. Benjamin Harrison's great admiration

for them and of her exercising her pencil and brush in portraying them in life-like exactness. She told how she herself and Mrs. Grover Cleveland had together made special search at one time for rare beautiful flowers, and had not been able to find anything in their judgment more exquisite than orchids. She went on with her simple story about orchids, relating many little impressive incidents, and protracting her talk, so that both men had to reduce themselves to the noble attitude of deeply interested listeners,—a function rare in most people. Both wondered at her comprehensive knowledge of orchids and great, inexhaustible fund of incidents pertaining to this hardy, showy flower. She moved about with wily grace, Peter Wilkins imagined, and he conceived he saw profound purpose in it all. Nevertheless, it seemed to be apparent that the silent drama had no reference to him,—that he was a mere super. And that was fine, just his humor, anything in the world for her, the rarest girl of all girls on earth, the most truly, picturesquely human, the most positively divine. To be sure, now, he would never be anything but Peter to her, but thank fortune she would always be Mina to him; always be his dearest sister, never his sweetheart, and therefore he would never create Petrarchian odes to her. He read in her present animation an effort to countervail or overcome something inimical or undesirable relative to Nero; and yet girl's ways are often misleading or "flirtacious." And again, suppose he had not read the events correctly and she were in truth putting forth an ambitious effort for commendation. However, such a purpose, so shallow and bird-witted, he could not attribute to her. There

was nothing, he decided finally, for him to do but to stand still and see what he would see. In nothing could he take the initiative. Her smile, was it a deceitful smile, a trick smile, a bit of social hypocrisy, almost approaching the admirable?

Peter Wilkins profusively, intrusively thrust his nose into a Marechal Neil.

"I hope I do not give offense to the roses by my exceeding familiarity," he said looking up for a remark.

"My beauties have been better trained," Mina said, in the color of a *Jacque-minot*, as some maniacal philosophers would say, or profess to believe.

"They are like basilisks imbibing the color of their surroundings," Nero observed in a fitting manner. Peter Wilkins took note of the compliment. He was jealous that he was not the pater of it. So he said supplementary:

"Or hypocrites."

Nero flashed at him. Peter saw it not, he wished Nero to see.

"I decapitate the intractable," she remarked.

"We are in a position worse than a *Torquemada* could invent," said Peter Wilkins; "and may lose our heads," he added.

"You are not flowers," she answered.

"At least not hothouse," said Peter Wilkins, glancing clandestinely at Nero, whose Lordship in an American view might be taken as a social hothouse product.

"And in no danger of losing our unworthy, uncrowned heads," said Nero direct to Mina.

"How do you gentlemen mean about losing your heads?" asked Mina slily.

"O, we mean not by wine, women, success, joy, flattery, promotion, money, debauchery, and the like," answered Nero.

"Nor love," amended Peter Wilkins.

"Your explanation is comprehensive," she answered in half melancholy meditation.

"I would be a decapitated flower before very long, should I be potted and labeled," said Peter in sober comedy.

"Perhaps," she assented.

"I would be obstreperous; am so by nature; and it would be unnecessary for me to attempt to explain in order to save my poor head, for my style of thought would give me dead away and excite you to combat me more. I could set up the plea in ordinary that I was not there to explain, not there to apologize, but you would not hear me, and would go on and impose dictations upon me. I would aver I couldn't understand your motive for not listening to my explanation, which as I saw it needed no combatting, but which you did not see that way. I could not understand you, unless you were simply combatting *me*, a poor, mismated, unkissed, yellow flower, and not my plea for my head. Your position of combat, toward *me* personally instead of toward my arguments, would show *me* to be a *persona non grata* to you and my theory deserving of no consideration at all."

Peter Wilkins was willing to smile at his prolonged speech, but as no one else did he desisted. In this mo-

mentary instance his act was shaped by the immediate conditions.

"But, Mr. Wilkins," said Nero blandly, "a quarrel is hopeful, for all that, a thing easily remedied by a kiss, and prophetic of certain submerged mental states."

"I can find no shadow of variation in that statement to antagonize seriously," said Peter. "But, if I may go on a little, it also signifies a certain expressed open state. I want to go to heaven when I die. And I fear that no one with a cultivated habit of criticising and fault-finding, such as I have, will ever reach that sublime port. I take it the charitable governor of that heavenly republic don't want that critical make-up of uncharitable citizenship and cranks in his domain. There the question propounded to each immigrant to that country, populated by death instead of propagation, will be, I have reasons to think: 'Whatsoever evil, or quarrel, ye have done unto the *least* of these ye have done it unto me.' That cuts out all those who quarrel at home, those who fling words around carelessly like bootjacks at midnight cats. And where am I at? Perhaps all those who imagine that all the baggage necessary to travel with into heaven is a gold harp, a palm, and a pair of wings such as Icarus used are dead wrong; for one must also have an ear for music, and a tablet and pencil and a package of envelopes. Some pastors tell us this these latter days. They say all are saved who improve in quality and in mental attainments, and can devote themselves to the ecstasy of calculus in that great land of Beulah. No good angel is entitled to desk-room in heaven, unless he can solve the theorem stated thus: $X^2 = Y^2$, or some

such equally soul-thrilling equation, involving the logarithms of Napier or Briggs. The human unit is divided and subdivided, into electrons perhaps, and these divinity scientists have a 'soul-mind,' suitable to their theory, and so the higher education, so-called, affects the 'soul-mind' for eternal good. That is to say, artificial acquirements stick and accompany one to heaven. It's nice for some to think that education is salvation."

"And it may be, Mr. Wilkins, in a limited sense," said Mina, which showed him that his "learned digression" had not offended her. It seemed to him that Nero Pensive was fidgety. He thrust his obtrusive nose into the virtuous faces of twenty different flowers while Peter was "discoursing about nothing," as he himself frequently characterized his light, airy, rambling talks.

"I see very plainly that ignorance is a crime, but there is very much of it in the world, and in some places where Christianity has been taught the longest. I can't understand this anomaly, if education is supreme," said Peter Wilkins. "Of course ignorance is less a matter of habit than of heredity and environment. With all the most favorable conditions possible, a fool will be a fool still. Circumstances can not create capability; capability can largely shape environment. 'Though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.' And on the other hand, without opportunity a splendid intellect may be left wrapped in a napkin,—may never be awakened, and no doubt many a cemetery contains a 'mute inglorious Milton,' a 'village Hampden,' a 'Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood,' a Lincoln undeveloped. Now, I should

truly be 'let way down,' if I could conceive of either of you thinking I was trying to say smart things to show what wonderful creature I am; but I say these things because I think I know my auditors and they know me. And this brings me to the 'lastly' of my discourse about nothing, really nothing,—worse than Brick Pomeroy's 'Nonsense.' Mrs. Partington had some reason for her existence and her son Ike's, but I have none. Now, 'lastly,' I may assume for arguments' sake, that I don't know who you are. And then answer pertly that I do know who you are. If you were strangers I could say I don't know your names and fames and histories and families and wealth,—things men-made, social distinctions; but I do know at the very first glance something of your natures as declared by God in your person, height, eyes, air, spirit, voice, manner, color, style, and the like. Human nature doesn't vary so much from my own. All have the same general mould from the same red clay, but vary in the degree of intensity of the being, slightly different proportions of the two elements, the only elements that enter into the construction of every soul, that is, emotion and mind. So we can know a person by ourselves in whom there is a saint and a devil,—two things in every mortal, no exceptions, and must be according to God's great law of opposites."

Peter Wilkins took the manner of a peripatetic and walked up and down, seemingly restless. Once he detected Nero looking furtively at him, as if to determine whether the garrulous chap were playing a comic part or simply "couldn't help it." A sly smile once from Mina was the license for the ungallant monologue.

Mina was uncertain as to the outcome of her purpose to consume the time in the conservatory and give the Earl no opportunity for a confidential conference. And yet she was not positively settled in her conviction that she wanted to deny him the privilege of a private talk. At all events this triangular tete-a-tete was a pleasant dalliance, but it could result in nothing, and therefore some things would have to be done over again. She hesitated, she decided, she ran to a flower with one view in mind and left it with another. These long speeches detracted from the interest in the flowers. Flowers never vary their speech, but men do.

Everything, every fleshly thing, in the world is on the defensive, fearing the antagonism of the other. It is nature's great law, the opposite of protection, to harm one another. It was so decreed in the beginning, as recorded in Genesis first. Strangers meet, and guard instinctively against words, blows, and emotions from the other. It is the law of dispersion, disparagement, division, dissolution. Mina felt she was in a defensive attitude, and the assault seemed as desperate as that upon Port Arthur.

Weakness was not the cause of her indeterminate state, —rent with indecision and wonder "what next." It was partly due to the much agitation she had suffered in the course of the exciting day.

At length she led the two gentlemen back to where the ex-Senator, the Professor, and Clever Hesperus were still smoking and discussing the issues upon which hangs the fate of the nation. Mina had great interest in all economic and social problems and had some acquaint-

ance with the modern writers upon these grave matters, as for instance, Henry George, Karl Marx, Lyman Abbott, Edward Bellamy, Benjamin Kidd, and others of less repute. However, all these writers entertained views from which in the main she diverged and overthrew in fair argument.

Peter Wilkins entered the room first. Nero put his hand lightly on her arm, merely to gain her attention, and said in undertone:

"A word, please, before we enter."

"'All hope abandon ye who enter here,'—is that your motive for restraining me from entering this door?" She laughed. Had she herself abandoned hope!

"No. I have not quite so understood, that there was concert in this hot-house outing between you and Mr. Wilkins, or I might adopt the line you quote," said Nero in a tone meant only for her ears.

"I do not hesitate to impeach any thought that intimates that Mr. Wilkins knew anything of my purpose. I need no accessory to my plans. But I consider him so loyal a friend that if I had proposed anything like a concert which you believe to exist in some sense, expressed or implied, he would not have hesitated to assist me. But suppose we had agreed, what would you do now?"

"Well, faint heart never won fair lady, you know we were told when mere children," he said, a little disconcerted. "In brief, may I ask—"

"Do you hint a time limit, or do you demand prompt responses to your love catechism? Love is subject to no legislation, is the subject of no tyrant, can't be forced, as you no doubt know."

"I believe we understand each other. Still I would 'explain' to you to your perfect satisfaction, as often and as long as you desired, but our time is consumed and I must hurry—the curse of the age. I have a serious and all important question to me to ask you. Need I tell you it? Please tell me that I may hope. I press that on you now. I would be less a man, if I was not concerned to know what would make me infinitely happy. Say nothing more than that I may hope. I would be a secret and recreant lover, if I were not ardent enough to urge this."

"I've no desire to shun you. We can easily, intelligently, and intelligibly express ourselves—no law to forbid,—and so there is no need to evade this question, that you insist shall be 'fought out' between us. I had no desire at the first, at no time, to evade or elude you. And have none now. But I'm of a singular nature—I guess,—and compulsion galls me, I'm free to confess."

"I hope you do not regard my pleadings as having in them in any degree the unfortunate spirit of force."

"No one is safely competent to read himself as he is, or determine the every influence, inference, implication, and result of his every word, act, and feeling, and so I'm charitable on that point," she concluded.

"No doubt I warmly insisted, and I do yet, and I don't regret it, for no lover is worthy the name who will not do that."

He felt he had won his point over her objection. They stood in the light of the great hall, and he was quite close looking intently at her, while she saw only the broad steps leading to the floor above. They could dis-

tinctly hear the men within. His influence was disturbing and yet charmed.

Peter Wilkins was wondering, and smiled to think that after all Nero Pensive had obtained a private interview. It was useless, was it not, to deny an English Earl anything he might demand.

"There is a difference between a pleading request, a fair beseechment, and an insistence," she distinguished in terms, turning her full, fearless brown eye in the splendor of sincerity upon him. Then she thought,—

"'What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted!
Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just.'"

She manifested no impatience, which would have been insistence on her part for an adjournment at once of this conference, and he was certainly civilly calm,—if calmness means a lack of the emotional element, the best part of humanity.

"If I but understood how to present my just cause before you in an approved manner, a manner that is not bungling, I would be happy," he said formally.

"I hope you do not regard me as finically critical and methodical, with a cramped idea that there is but one right way to do everything."

"See! Again I express myself unfortunately." He was not honest in what he said.

"Am *I* the cause of your assumed mistakes in this, or are you?" It was quick, close, almost curt.

"Not you—not you!"

He was not execrating himself for uttering what

seemed an untruth, but he was lamenting that her attitude of mind and emotion was such as to induce her to object to all he said rather than accord with him and see no ground for withstanding him.

"I do not want to seem ungracious,—would avoid even the appearance of evil,—but the truth to tell I find I have not always spoken disingenuously to you, when I was perfectly competent to do so. And I am not yet deprived of my common reason by 'emotional insanity' or 'exaggerated ego,' permit me to say. Therefore no grace is to be accorded to me for my 'plain-spoken words,' which are necessarily undiplomatic, to say the very least, and unwise."

"But—to return. May I hope?" Truly it did seem useless to oppose an "English Earl."

"Truly, you should not ask me this, for a hope built on my wind-driven soul is built on sand, nothing more. Moreover, hope is a matter personal, and need not necessarily involve or bind two people."

She assured herself this statement was the very essence of frankness and pure reason, at the moment misunderstanding the full scope of the ingenuousness. Personal emergency made fair many things, that on other occasions would be pronounced uncandid, artful.

"I hope I may hope, to be sure. May I hope?"

"As I intimated, I can't adjust your mental and emotional attitudes. That is your affair. Your categorical manner, I indeed ingenuously confess, can not bind you or me, and I can't bind myself to anything. I'm not disposed to moral decisions or contracts between us now. Time holds the fulfillment of all things. You are not inexperienced in love diplomacy, I understand."

“ ‘Uncertain, coy, and hard to please
And variable as the shade.’ ”

“ ‘When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou,’ ”

is the conclusion of your countryman's thought,” she retorted on him.

“You do not deny me hope?”

“Neither deny nor affirm, of course.”

“Thanks sweet girl, thanks,” said this cage of unclean birds, this whited sepulchre. He approached, seized her hand, and turned his eyes and smile in most engaging manner upon her face. His face seemed to have lost every vestige of enthusiasm, the engine and force that moves the world. He was but repeating his lines. His financially tragic desperation demanded the performance. He was seeking to take another's claim to this mine of gold.

She withdrew her hand resolutely, turned her face away, for his touch had a beseeching and confounding effect. It seemed indeed to pulsate evil, to inoculate her with something forbidding.

At this point the male voices in the room hurtled out and down the corridor and away, and a confused laugh succeeded. Peter Wilkins had related a story on President Roosevelt. One day he sent his “kids” all out to air in a commodious vehicle. As the driver touched the spirited horses and they whirled away the father looked fondly after them, pointed a dramatic finger at the receding family, and exclaimed: “Isn't that a fine lay-out

for you!" The story was suggestive of the President's insistent views on "race suicide."

They had discussed stock-exchange methods, and every twist and turn of Wall street and "frenzied finance." Peter Wilkins was confident the stock exchange is a gambling house pure and simple, and without it this country couldn't enjoy the blessings of a panic! It is the medium for spreading alarms over the leased wires of the commission brokerage houses. No man, who buys and sells stocks, produces anything directly,—except millionaires and paupers and panics. The stock-exchange commission brokers are purely the "lamb" herders, and to be sure work for the owners of the stocks they sell. The bank owners are the stock owners, and they easily bull or bear the market, and buy or sell on a "sure thing," something they have made themselves, as did Thorpe in the "Market Place." Peter Wilkins said "he was wound up." He went on:

"Why are court injunctions wrong? Because they restrain intent to do wrong? Well, that's a good reason, to be sure! Upon the same sort of class logic, the supreme courts should be damned for pronouncing class laws unconstitutional, or any law unconstitutional that labor wants for special 'get-even' purposes. Labor's views are not universal, not in the majority, and are not establishing new fundamental laws that were not framed in the Edenic curse. And furthermore, I'm going to vote differently henceforth and forever, because President Roosevelt lets it rain in spots and the farmers, one of his greatest constituencies, suffer for want of rain. And again furthermore, he doesn't put up farm prices high enough,

nor advance wages, nor put prices down low enough on the things I must buy. And, too, he lets the bosses run things and get rich quick, and that makes the poor poorer. I say, give *us all* a chance (don't ask me to define 'chance;' 'chance' means something to be sure); and let us 'divy up' even and 'let out' the tariff robbers and the trust thieves. I emphatically believe in equality, because God was wrong when he made some little trees and some big trees. I think I could improve a little on God's work. I want equality of opportunity, equality of intellect, equality of happiness (never mind human capacities), equality of purse (never mind the differences of energy bequeathed by blood). 'Egalite, liberte, fraternite.' I'm perfectly economical you see."

Peter assumed a grim seriousness. It seemed he believed what he was saying.

"I have no definite assurance that my very good friend (and he will abundantly pardon me for saying it) is entirely correct. But since he has thus openly expressed his sentiments, I have no doubt he is perfectly sincere and correct," said Mr. Exact.

"I'm always open and above board, and everybody knows just what my few lonely, scattered, deformed opinions are," said Peter looking at a pattern on the ceiling.

"The soundest man in ten states," said ex-Senator Wadsworth, patting Peter zealously upon the shoulder.

They emerged into the hall upon Mina and Nero Pensive. The evening was gone, and perhaps no one was quite satisfied with its eternal record, except Mr. Wadsworth and the Professor. And when the Professor

walked down the hall toward the front door, accompanied by the others in irregular order, he smiled kindly on Mina, and she saw the silent wonder in his face.

The day was done, its tale was told, its history recorded, its destiny irrevocable. All men in all the ends of the earth had gone forward a step into the veil of mystery that lies beyond, the fate of every one being settled from day to day by the unaccountable moves upon the checker-board of life.

CHAPTER XXVI

NERO Pensive had long been "dodging" Clarissa Harlow, and the reasons for his course were most intense and startling. And it was evident that Dean McBarron was mixed up in the affair in a manner that made it agreeable not to cultivate intimacy with Nero Pensive. Mith Gulliver, the traitor spy on Clarissa Harlow, was in New York at the dictation of his master.

No one knew that Nero had been to Atlantic City, incognito, and he was not telling it in Gath nor publishing it in Jewry. And the police, that sagacious, underfed (!) authropophagi, had not found the thief who had invaded the Wadsworth cottage at an hour when honest men should be at home. However, they had a "clew," which was perhaps as much as was necessary to let the thief escape.

Nero Pensive assiduously watched the telegraph offices wherever he was, giving information where to find him. He had received word from Mith to repair without delay to New York. This message, you know, he had reasons for disregarding. It was to be expected that other information would follow the first message.

As he walked away from the stately home of the ex-Senator, pleased with nothing, he concluded to make still another attempt to deceive Miss Wadsworth into a

union with him. An emergency existed, and this must be done at once. His steps wandered into the Union Telegraph Office. There he signed for the expected message sent by Mith, his henchman. He read. Dean McBarron, unaccompanied by his great friend, Robert Burns, was at that minute either in Washington or on his way there.

Clarissa knew all about this. She knew when he and Burns left the Chicago hospital. Burns had not neglected his friend in his misfortune.

"Gad! I shall remain here," exclaimed Nero triumphantly, stalking out of the telegraph office, with eyes from which the love-light had fled long since and in which had settled confirmed blasé shades. He was not elated, he was not moved by jealousy, no envy stirred his burnt-out blood, no revenge moved his mental arcanum to conclusions. Life had little taste for him; every prospect had been removed, every sweet had been drunk to the dregs, every source of pleasure had been exhausted. There was little worth while left in him of an admirable sort, such as would be creditable to offer to a woman to make her life nobler and happier, or such as a pure, decent, good woman could feel proud to consort with,—nothing but what would pall on the wife, turn bitter, and make her revolt at her unwise, unhappy combination,—a miserable, life-long, everlasting mistake. He no longer possessed anything that would inspire a woman to love and devotion. Indeed life was almost an imposition. And yet the miserable, mistaken man wanted money,—he thought he did. It was money and the want of it that had made his life an absolute failure.

Money was his undoing. A drone, by the very laws of nature is an evil and unhappy. All schemes for the ultimate happiness of all men alike, that omit perpetual, useful employment, are unphilosophical. For the reason that they omit the real source of happiness. This is true, because it is God-ordained human nature,—toil brings rest.

So without continuous or laborious thought or unbroken strain of emotions, Nero plodded along the street in the light of the power-plant, and at last stumbled into his hotel and into bed. There was little difference to him whether it were night or day. It is true that he who should write this roué's biography would have to note that his greatest activity was at night, and that his deeds rarely took being in daylight. He had, in undisguised truth, been a blackwinged bat, neither shunning night nor appearing at ease in the glow of the sun, which is the lamp unto the feet and a light unto the path of most of God's best creatures.

And this was the man seeking the hand of America's brightest, best, purest young ladies, not for a life of service to her for her happiness but for the unholy and selfish purpose of obtaining money—money, and that only. It meant her certain destruction, and he knew it. She was nothing to him, nothing more than any other woman; her purse was all. Would money be her undoing? He would see her on the morrow, and at one *coup de grace*, maybe a *coup de main*, he would make a fortune for himself alone,—one and indivisible, one exceeding the mines of Golconda or Tarshish. He would steal a gold mine. It was a speculation without the element of chance in it.

And he slept. But there were winds even in this man's sleep. The sahara of his immediate life had no oases. Sentiment had been taken away, or lived up or out, consumed, and he was in the category of the man from whom Jupiter had removed all sensibility or feelings at the man's own unwise request.

Mina was in the great, unhappy world of hesitancy, doubt, indecision, and to break the spell of it was not possible. However, her heart was correct through it all. Her father, not as a thing of indifference, but on the ground that he could not meddle in so important affair to her, refused to counsel her but not to talk about the English Earl and Prof. P. Thomas Nelson. And her mother, with equal wisdom, kissed her daughter, talked liberally and openly about the two men and Mina's position in the rivalry, but said in so vital a question which should affect the whole life of the girl whom she loved too well to mislead by her own feelings, she could not, dared not advise. It was not a question as to what the mother's preferences were. It was the daughter's. The daughter had not interfered in the mother's love choice, and the mother should not interfere in the daughter's. The situation was most intense for the girl. It was a hot debate between her intellect and her emotions or heart. And there was no court to assist. Her heart mistrusted the man, as the Trojans did the Greeks even bearing gifts, but her unemotional judgment was inclined to hear him. She was rent, she was torn, she was broken on the wheel, she was tortured, she was consumed as with a fire, she was alone as one in a frigid zone or on an ice floe, she was in a pit she had

not digged, she was in the agony of tears. And in the privacy of her room she prayed God, who had always been her counsel and her guide, to be with her in this last trial. His word has always said to her: "He will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed." And she slept, almost the dreamless slumber of those with clear conscience.

Nero Pensive, next morning, was walking on a by-street, his object being to escape conspicuousness, when he turned a corner plump into the faces of Clarissa Harlow, Alice Moore-Greenfield, and Clever Hesperus. The surprise was well distributed, and no one appeared specially to disguise the fact. Nero bowed gravely and lifted his hat. And so did Clever Hesperus. The young ladies inclined their heads in recognition, smiled, and spoke. All stopped.

"Good morning."

Nero returned the compliment in like terms, though formally icy.

"It is a matter, I am bound to say and also proud to say, that delights me, to meet the friend of these two young ladies," said Mr. Exact Clever Hesperus, looking at the two young girls. They forthwith introduced the two men.

"It is indeed very fortunate I met you," said Clarissa to Nero in an ominously reserved voice.

"Indeed!" frowned Nero, construing her words to suit himself, to be sure, and assuming the defiant. "Beg pardon, but I have not the honor of knowing the young lady with you. It would please me exceedingly to meet her."

"Indeed!" sneered Alice.

"Indeed!" he retorted with a suavity that might be refined villainy, or mental cruelty, but which was not perceived by the innocent Clever Hesperus.

"O, ah, indeed!" said Clarissa, humoring his attitude. "Beg pardon. Mr. Pensive, my friend Miss Moore-Greenfield."

He bowed gravely: Alice shrieked in cold-blooded laughter.

"With smooth dissimulation, skilled to grace,
A devil's purpose with an angel's face,"

he denied all previous knowledge of her in the presence of a stranger. That he had not denied her at a previous meeting signified nothing now. He must not know her at this point of time in this city. And a witness to the fact that he knew her not would count in his favor.

"I was saying, when—. It is fortunate I met you, I was just saying, Mr. Pensive, and I now repeat the fact,—will you join us in a jaunt to the White House?" said Clarissa.

"I would be exceedingly pleased to go with you, and enjoy your splendid presence, you know, but a hasty appointment in the other direction denies me this glorious privilege."

"The Chinese were and are adepts in Chesterfieldian declinations,—indeed could give Mr. Chesterfield cards and spades and then beat him," said Alice, a swell of scorn in her soul gaining expression in her face and eyes and manner. She was not ashamed of it. "There was

a time, Mr. Ron Cornwallis, when you would have jumped at the chance to dance attendance on us."

"You speak in terms all Greek to me," he said rebukingly and sternly to her, casting an under look at Clever Hesperus.

"If you were as conversant with Greek as you are with the matter you deny all knowledge of, you would command a Greek professorship in some of our best American universities," said Alice sarcastically.

"Of course we do not desire you to obtrude your presence upon us. No self-respecting gentleman would wish to do so impolite a thing. But on the other hand, now, we are not consulting your wishes as to whether you desire us with you. Therefore, if the mountain will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet will go to the mountain," said Clarissa in peremptory tones. And Clever Hesperus began to open his eyes. Something was dawning on him.

"We do not wish to deprive you of the exceeding great pleasure of our valuable company, which you profess to esteem very highly, and which we have no reason to doubt," said Alice witheringly, bitingly, casting a scornful look at him. Clever Hesperus saw that she knew him, despite his denial. The denial now seemed to him but part of a drama. The conversation opened his exact eyes to a rotundity not normal.

"I may say, I presume," Clever began, "that I am quite unable to solve so difficult a social problem, as to the fact of previous acquaintance or not; but I may say that your acquaintance with the scope of my survey or perview has speedily assumed singular proportions."

"If I were disposed to comment, Mr. Hesperus, (quite a classical name), I would say that what you have here witnessed has not been of a friendly character, for these splendid-looking, gay-smiling, beautiful-figured young ladies seem to have some secret design." And Nero bowed as if he had uttered a poser,—a squelcher.

"My name,—long line of ancestry," said the man of t's and s's.

"Evidently, Nero, your unholy, distressing thought just uttered illustrates you," Clarissa observed with cunning force and pith and piquancy.

"I've no desire, ladies," said Nero bowing again, "to be one of a party in a street scene." He stepped forward two or three steps. "And I beg you will excuse me from further participation in so ungallant conversation. There seems to be a set determination to oppose all I say and do, and it is not in the laws of gallantry to be a party to it. Therefore I beg—"

"Goodness me, what a roast!" laughed Clarissa.

"Certainly you beg," said Alice, and she hurried and caught his arm. Then: "Let's proceed." She pressed his arm forward. She had no impression now that he would even try to kidnap her. He did not resist, for he knew that would confirm Clever Hesperus in the absolute correctness of the girl's position, which was the very thing he had denied for the sake of the witness of this man. So he walked forward with her, and Clarissa Harlow and Clever Hesperus demurely followed. Whither—what, was the query Nero entertained for a moment. They would understand he had forgone his hurried appointment, in order to entertain them and enjoy their company.

So he took them to the Ebbitt hotel, one of the very best hotels in the city.

As they were entering, in the main rotunda they, without the possibility of evasion, came squarely upon Dean McBarron, and out of the office emerged Mith Gulliver.

"This is not my day," broke out Nero oracularly, pausing in indecision.

"O, my friend," cried Clarissa Harlow rushing up and kissing Dean. Nero crossed moodily behind them. Here was the very man he had long been seeking.

"Sweet girl," said Dean McBarron returning her caress. Alice looked on in puzzled wonderment. She beheld a man of the splendid medieval type, and the magnetism of his sheer presence impressed her.

Then Clarissa introduced Dean to Alice and Clever Hesperus, saying:

"I think you know Nero Pensive."

"Very well."

"I know you not," suddenly denied Nero. But I shall be pleased to cultivate your acquaintance." [Would he!]

"And here is Mith Gulliver; Dean McBarron," said Clarissa.

"Yes," Dean said simply.

Mith looked like a man in a daze. Something was brewing, he knew, but what, was the query.

"I may state for the good of all concerned, that my business is not here," said Nero. Then he went toward the door to the street, and the rest followed him, as it were. It was deep in Clarissa's mind that he should not escape, slick as he might be,—as he had in Paris. Then

he saw a passing face that had good American gold coin stamped all over it.

He proposed to go to the Arlington. No one objected.

They were seated as a private party in the best room of the second story of this hotel, which was in a locality where the arteries of trade were not so congested. The room was carpeted, plainly furnished, but supplied with the comforts and modern appointments of most hostelries to-day. The room overlooked the main street that passed, and had somewhat of a quiet, excluded air, not uninviting. It was little less than the counterpart of the Ebbitt or the Willard, where so many legislators and public men were wont to congregate.

Dean McBarron sat near the door, that opened upon the leading passage way. Nero Pensive sat at one of the front windows where he could look out upon the street, should ennui strike him. The rest were seated about in no special manner, save that Mith Gulliver seemed to dispose himself where he could guard Nero and watch Dean McBarron, whom he had now come to suspect of evil designs upon Nero, instead of the reverse which was the true case.

There was evidently an unexpressed tension of feeling that had in it the very elements of latent tragedy. But that is not an infrequent state of feeling met with in all sorts of human combinations and congregations.

CHAPTER XXVII

“**I** HAVE something to say to you, Nero Pensive, in the presence of these friends of mine, Alice and Dean and Clever,” began Clarissa. “Some of it will not be pleasant to you to hear, I imagine.”

She turned in her chair to him. Her voice was firm and cool, without tune or modulation, sterile of all effusion and affection, an even monotone of stern decision. Her round pearl eyes partook somewhat of the dark emotion that animated them. She had the man coralled at last, and now was her opportunity. She continued, after a long, deep breath:

“Some of it you already know, sir, but some of it you do not. You shall hear it now.”

All looked at her, for none had surmised her object, not even Dean McBarron who sat at the door like a Cerberus. Nero himself was expectant, but prepared to deny everything. She knew he would, but this was a most impressive method of informing her friends of her life story.

The revelation she made is a wonderful one, amazing in its success and intensity, surprising in the romantic events crowded into so short a space of time, and flattering in the world-wide career. She was a marvelous, fascinating woman, and some even said she possessed hypnotic powers of attraction that brought admirers some of whom were undesirable.

She was a farmer's daughter, and romped in the blessed air and golden sunshine, and skipped and danced upon the hills, and gathered the wild flowers and tore off their petals and strewed them in multi-colored clouds upon the hill winds that bore them away with a wind's will, and lived her beautiful young life in close communion with nature and nature's God. She lived in an old Welsh homestead, a two-story brick, on a public road leading into Philadelphia. Her father was said to have the "drug habit," even though of good Quaker blood. But his little sweet girl was a hearty-hearted girl, and her zealousness was forgotten when she cast her round, pearl, winning dark-brown eyes upon one. And the spirited little lark sang like a mocking-bird, a purity of tone that suggested a "natural voice."

At fourteen Clarissa was a lovely girl, sweet, pure, modest, beautiful, and full of rejoicing promise. Her mother tired of a husband, who was not a husband but a "drug fiend," and left him, going into the city, cherishing extravagant ambitions, it was said, about the charming daughter who was lifted by the unwise mother into altitudes of levity and deceit. Or was it sunken in the pit of levity and deceit. They dwelt in Philadelphia, and it was there that a wealthy young man, a prosperous corporation lawyer, discovered the vocal possibilities of the girl. He was a great friend of the family. In fact was a neighbor in the country in his childhood, but older than Clarissa. With the mother's consent, probably connivance, he became the generous patron of the young warbler. She was sent abroad, where she obtained a finished musical education. She sang and

earned money. When she returned home her finished beauty and lavish expenditures for equipages, clothes, display, and general living expenses developed some comment. Her flirtation with a naval officer gained her some sensational notoriety and brought about at length the dismissal of the young officer from the service of the navy department. Then she became a chorus girl, not of the floridora type, however, and danced with Loie Fuller, and met a man known as the "Beau Brummel of the turf," named Royal Hartline, and through him caught the spirit of the turf and a love for fine horses. She came to be an expert horsewoman, owned two noble blooded horses, and drove in the streets with a liveried groom. She became a heartless coquette and flirted with other men, and a great tangle grew up about her. Men fought over her, and a suit in court demanded a hundred thousand dollars restitution to the horseman, Royal Hartline, from another turfman for losses on her account on the race course. She bewitched men and made them mad. A counter suit for the same amount of money was instituted against her, alleging blackmail. These suits revealed the fact that men were giving her large sums in jealous rivalry.

Meanwhile, the gay, giddy, over-indulged, unwise girl lived so extravagantly as to astonish everybody. Her mother had married again, though her first and divorced husband was still living. However, he was unconcerned about her. Clarissa lived for a very short time with her mother, but with her deep-seated habit of gayety and whirl and song this staid, old-fashioned life was insufferable. So far her past life had been unlovely and un-

fortunate, and stood in somber contrast with the heights she climbed later.

She disappeared from home now, and the Paris boulevards heard of the American songstress named Clarissa Harlow. She was credited with dazzling beauty, almost superhuman, but dark-visaged, soul-gangrened rumor declared she had a "past." However, introductions to her were difficult to secure, and she was chaperoned by an elderly woman known as the Baroness von Googoo-Eyes, who had the entre to good Parisian society, was immensely rich, and whose deceased husband had been a distinguished member of the German diplomatic corps. Though the Almanac de Gotha contained no record of the Baron von Googoo-Eyes, the Baroness put it easily and indifferently aside by saying she was originally an F. F. V., members of which had officers in the United States army.

The Baroness and her very beautiful ward occupied a house in Rue Hamelin, the rent of which was annually a neat little sum. The Baroness presented the famous beauty to several in the American colony in the palm room of the Hotel Continental, stating that Miss Clarissa Harlow was studying music in Paris with the very best teachers. The beauty and vivacity of the lovely girl won her attention and inquiry, and it was found that she was a pupil in music of the world-celebrated teacher of singing, Mme. Marchesi. Clarissa wore extravagant costumes and was covered with jewels, and though she had a marvelous voice she did not devote herself seriously to study. The Baroness gave musicales in her home, and some men and women of prominent and excellent social

standing were present. Then these two women appeared at receptions held in the home of the American Consul General, and Clarissa's fame as a great beauty spread rapidly. She was demure, engaging, cultured, and lovely, and her portrait painted by Jobert received a place of honor in the salon. It was entitled "The American Beauty," and Paris studied it enraptured and full of comment, and then sought an introduction to the original,—a quasi triumph. She had apartments for a time in the Elyses Palace hotel, and while there the Shah of Persia arrived. He roamed through the corridors, and one day met Clarissa. Where she went the Shah, now madly in love, went, figuratively at her heels. He offered her jewels in lavish profusion, asking her to become his first Sultana in Persia. She played the heartless coquette with him, accepted his rope of pearls, and in the end forsook him. He was not her "style." But the fact of his infatuation increased her general repute.

She had next for escort in the fashionable places of Paris, Baron de Punster, who met her through M. Jobert. This appearance in public with the Baron increased her prestige and social eclat, and she finally promised him her hand in marriage.

There is never an up but there is a down. Here came the collapse of her social bubble, which had been a mild form of the tulip craze. Humanity and sentiments go in gangs. A dispatch from America crept into the Paris papers at this point in the vivid romance, stating that Harlow was not the patronymic of a distinguished American family, and that "La Belle Americaine" was but a chorus girl with an interesting past. This was a

disinterested meddling for the defense of the glory of the aristocracy. It was a sensation indeed, and Paris gasped and stared. And then no one could be found who had ever worshipped at her shrine, or received her in his home, or enjoyed her musical entertainments in the Rue Hamelin. Then the "society" of Paris began to laugh bravely and relate strange incidents about the girl and her chaperone. Most noble "society," that's right,—keep your own skirts clean, whatever becomes of the "other fellow!"

But Clarissa Harlow was not suppressed. Paris was not the whole earth. She simply stepped from the formal receptions in the world of high social standing into another sphere in life, where "glory waited her." She closed the house in Rue Hamelin. Her supply of money seemed inexhaustible. She established herself in Blasé castle, an estate at Etretat, owned previously by an American impresario, of whom she purchased it for a large sum of cash, and lived there in great state with the Baroness. She entered her fine blooded horses in the shows of France and Germany, where she won many blue ribbons and was hailed as one of the most expert women whips in Europe. At length she engaged, as a pleasing amusement and satisfying relief to the dead monotony that had begun sometimes to come, with this American impresario to star in opera. In Milan, in Vienna, in Rome, in Naples, in Madrid, and even in St. Petersburg and Constantinople her vocal dramatic talent captured her wondering audiences.

It was now that she met Earl Nero Pensive, and he became her slave and gallant, and was so persistent and obedient in his attentions that she finally, "to get rid of

him," agreed to marry the handsome, devoted Englishman. She said she could not endure this English Earl to make a fool of himself any longer. Then she married him. On his part he purposed the marriage to be a pretended affair. But Clarissa had seen too much of life and its vagaries and fallacies not to profit by her observations, and so she secretly saw to it that the ceremony should be legal and witnessed by proper legal papers.

When Clarissa narrated this core fact, the interest and attention of all being riveted upon her for this frank, marvelous, self-condemnatory confession, Nero straightened up and took genuine interest for the first time. He looked at her and silent bewilderment danced from wide-open, astonished eyes. She spurned his frowns. He was not as much to her now as he once was. He was nobody but Nero.

"You lie!" he yelled.

"Ucko! you man of titular gentility," she calmly interposed in scathing rebuke. "This truth is what I wanted to tell you, and is what denial will not rub out. The record in France is proof, and your attitude alters no written fact." She was not in the least perturbed by his domineering insolence. There was a momentary sensation among the rest, and every one's eyes expressed it.

"Ah-ha!" cried Alice, and her "ha" would have offended the Sweet Singer of Israel, "A bigamist!"

The situation deepened. Nero grew uneasy. Mith Gulliver and Dean McBarron struck attitudes of utter astonishment. Nero's intensity confessed the truth of Clarissa's story,—it touched, and the uncomplimentary, unwel-

come, ugly, openly condemned faults brought to light always hurt. The wounded bird flutters.

She had not shielded herself. She told a stirring, startling tale of personal activity, not always properly directed, and never righteously, therefore never wisely, by parental and friendly counsel and example.

Nero bounded to his feet, moved to extravagant passion (not "emotional insanity"), and cried furiously:

"A conspiracy! A conspiracy! All of you have combined in it, understand it, and have sought this opportunity to overthrow me, and for no good reason on earth. I have been entrapped in this building for this very diabolical purpose."

"I emphatically deny the allegation," firmly and promptly interposed Dean McBarron. He was a strong athlete, six feet tall, and of splendid figure. An Apollo in person, face, and spirit, black eyes and square chin, he was a man whom the ladies admired.

"A sweeping and impossible charge; can't be proved, you must permit me to say," said Clever Hesperus, coming as near a peremptory denial as was possible for him before ladies.

There was an unuttered feud between Dean and Nero, and they hated each other with royal, loyal hatred, though never a word before this had passed directly between them.

Alice with wide eyes was comprehending more clearly this great life story, and she sat mum, gazing, listening, alarmed. Even Mith was awakening to the truth that he had been ignorant of much of his patron's past record, and what hitherto had seemed beclouded with mystery was clearing away. Clever Hesperus was apparently as-

tounded into primeval silence, though he was never less meditative in his life. Nero and Clarissa both felt a near climax, but she for one had no desire to escape it. On the other hand she consented to herself that some sudden mighty revolution would clarify, right, and set things in order again.

When Dean promptly answered Nero, all were instantaneously moved as by a battery shocking all in a continuous circle. Clarissa looked restrainingly at Dean and continued to Nero:

"As I said, we were legally married in Paris, and the proofs of that fact are not wanting. I was then starring in opera. After marriage my operatic life went on as before, in fulfillment of my contract. My new hubby, professing smooth infatuation for me, his new wife, whom he believed was not his wife, seemed wholly devoted and bound up in the new relationship. I felt it was too fervent to keep.

"Now suddenly a sweet new face, with infinitely much more money than I had, appealed to him and he left me, deserted his wife whom he thought he had skillfully 'worked' or deceived, and left no polite note to explain his genteel conduct. But I had not been deceived. He followed her to London. You all know the glad-hearted, gold-hearted, noble, sweet, pure, intelligent girl, Miss Mina Wadsworth—"

Every one seemed to gasp in utter astonishment, and sit up straighter, and wonder how far the tragic tale was going. Nero thundered his flashing, angry eyes at her, and would have stricken her down had he dared. He leaped to his feet, reconsidered, and resumed his seat. His

action did not pass unnoticed, and Clarissa understood it better than any other one there.

"I said Miss Mina Wadsworth. She is the one that this unstable Reuben, the inconstant 'Earl,' this pink of politeness,—in some things, not in his word which is absolutely worthless,—followed to London, where he met her several times before she returned to America with her father. As soon as he could 'raise the wind,' he plunged into the Atlantic billows to find her on the other side—this financial derelict did. Here he has repeatedly insisted on her marriage to him, and he knows his very touch would contaminate the girl. For a time she wore a brilliant diamond ring, and rumor had it that they were engaged.

"I carried out my operative contract, and in London met Dean McBarron, he whom you see here. I came to this country expressly to do what I am doing this very minute, and you may know whether the uncertainty made certain is a pleasure to me or not. I'm inclined to suspect that Nero here is not as happy over it as I am. Exposure is the very essence of mental torture. I have exposed this man," pointing dramatically at Nero. "And I shall do it yet more effectually than I have here. I'm not through with him. He shall know the fury of a wife repudiated. I despise the mustard-seed-souled villain. When I have finished with him, he will be as badly shriveled up as She was in the play. I'm not 'gossiping through my hat,' nor threatening, nor romancing because I am mad,—that is the word common folks use,—nor persecuting him out of revenge; but simply informing him of some results he set

in motion that are yet to be. He will know more of me yet. I know as much of him as I want to know."

She paused. Collected.

"All can see that you and your Dean McBarron, as you call him, have together concocted a very plausible story against me. The main feature about it is that it is absolutely false, false in toto, false as Satan, false in every word and jot and tittle, false from first to last, false all through and in every fibre and in bone and marrow, false and self-condemning. In the first place, such a thing for me to do is impossible. Your story is impeachable by probabilities. Overshadowing your sordid story about me is the questionable life story of this conspiring woman. Her confession reveals her."

"And you too," she cried.

"I proclaim it an infamous conspiracy, a deep-laid blackmailing plot, a genuine hold-up game, a stand-and-deliver affair, and I want all these people to witness my strong characterization of it, here where it first comes to my attention." He looked too perturbed to mingle in his looks symptoms of guilt sufficiently pronounced to be visible.

"As an American I say that he who accuses another of conspiracy and of attempting blackmail must be ready to back up his assertions with proof, or he may make the intimate acquaintance of jail walls. Moreover, assertions like hearsay evidence are valueless before the law. Facts are what the law demands. Notice that I speak of the law." In uttering this Dean was not excited. He was the logical one not to be disturbed by mere words.

"The sequel to this little private conference, all must

see, will demonstrate the truth of what I have said," declared Nero in the manner of a cowed bravado, without due restraint within the limits of truth.

"Of what *I* have said, yes," asserted Clarissa in mock tones of suavity.

"I presume," in a sort of judicial manner, "that no one thinks of appealing to the law in the first instance to settle our differences. But be it understood, once for all, that my friend, Clarissa Harlow, shall not be misrepresented or imposed upon with impunity by any one, I care not who he is. As for myself I can always take care of No. 1."

"Of course you outnumber me here, and so all sorts of statements 'go,' but I shall defend my honor here or anywhere," said Nero.

"Bravo!" shrieked Alice.

"Your honor,—what do you call honor? Other folks have a different name for that in you you suppose to be honor. In you it is a very shoddy quality. What *is* honor in your view? Your honor needs no defense—you have none." Clarissa was bitter. She can not be excused for the unjustifiable taunt in her tone of voice and manner of expression. And the sneering laugh with which she accompanied the taunt revealed an ugly side of this much-abused girl, but she had put herself voluntarily in the way of harsh abuse socially. The blame for all social criticism and overthrow attaches largely to herself, whether through ignorance or selfish choosing or egotistic ambition.

"As I said, you will not understand me, for you do

not want to, and from ignorance there is no appeal," said Nero with melancholy severity.

"Honor! You have none to defend," said Clarissa savagely. "And as the Swiss soldier said to the French soldier, 'I suppose every one fights for that which he has the least of and needs most.' Honor is least in those who profess the loudest about it."

"Is it worth the candle," interposed Dean as a precaution and restraint upon Clarissa. She merely looked steadily at him a long moment, as it seemed, for answer. There was pause.

"I am, I must say to be candid, putting it as mildly as the limit allows, not a little disconcerted by all I have heard and seen here now," said the methodical, mathematical, torturingly accurate Clever Hesperus in his usual, unemotional tone of voice.

"I think Clarissa," said Alice as a friend and well-wisher, "has gone through much and suffered much."

"Thanks, my dear Alice. No words can tell the half. You have had nothing of the record of my thoughts and feelings and tears all along in my life. They are too sacred to lay bare to public inspection."

"I think the beginning of the explanation of it all, and the beginning of the end is at hand for you, Clarissa," said Dean in conservative, consolatory tones. For Clarissa, at the long tension seemed so wrought up that tears were imminent. She had at last begun to manifest agitation and neurotic conditions. Yet she had herself in obedience to the occasion.

"I think," dear Earl, we might reasonably, I say, and with profit adjourn this very emotional meeting,—I say.

Some declare, you know, that a high strain of emotion is satisfaction, so I think we had better adjourn this meeting," said Mith Gulliver, who was smart enough to scent trouble immediate. He thought a protraction of the discussion meant worse and worse, and now that it had come naturally to an end was the time to put the motion to adjourn. Longer continued it would dwindle still further into a heart-stabbing, low-down, high-wrought wrangle, from which flow no benefits, no good to any one, and which remedies nothing.

The two men were permitted to pass out. The others passed a few words in hasty commentary upon the scene, and then also departed. None about the hotel, none in Washington knew aught of what has just been related.

It is a singular fact that Nero did not execute his threat to kill Dean McBarron on sight." Dean declared that bluff did not "work."

CHAPTER XXVIII

NOT long after the recital of the story of Clarissa Harlow, Prof. P. Thomas Nelson, Mina, Peter Wilkins, and Ex-Senator Wadsworth were in a motor car skimming along the highway toward Brandenburg. It was an outing with no special object, save that which comes from fresh air and sunshine and good cheer. An hour later the Professor bade them good-by, set out for New York, and the following day took passage for England with the two other members of the special monetary commission.

Mina had put off her diamond ring, the gift of her father, the very time that Clarissa Harlow twitted her about it as an engagement ring. It was a misleading symbol just now.

Mina, her father, and Peter were at the station in Washington when the Professor departed. He was an impressive man, and his intelligence and activity of mind seemed written and stamped all over his intellectual face. His brow was broad and high and full, his hair black and smoothed away, his eye quick and winning, his voice clear, full, firm, and spectators beheld a man with the proud stamp of a divine animus within. It was an illustrious mark of distinction, such as human classification and social rating can not give. And as he approached Mina in well-fitting suit and becoming hat, just preceding his en-

try into the waiting coach, she was impressed that he was indeed a great man, and yet not isolated by greatness; and it suddenly "came to her" that his absence abroad for indefinite time would take out of her something and leave a blank. In a word she would miss him grievously and be lonesome. And he had not pressed from her the definite answer that lay mute at that moment in her secret heart. He came up with a frank smile. They were a little apart from the rest. Peter Wilkins was saying something amusing and provoking the Ex-Senator to hearty laughter.

"I should be rejoiced, if you and your parents were going across with me," he said.

"It is possible, as I said before, that we will be over there before your return," she answered by an honest smile that extended to her eyes.

"And I may write and cable you?"

"You have *carte blanche*."

"You scarcely realize how much pleasure you give one who is departing."

"Sometimes the one who remains behind is the most lonely," she said, fully realizing what she said, but saying it in spite of herself, as if moved by fate. He looked quickly at her, but her eyes were innocently resting on her father's manly face to their right. Then the fate of doubt shaped his words:

"That is to be determined by circumstances."

"The fates have ordered you a busy and fortunate life abroad," she said gently, "and you will no doubt see many eminent and important people."

"No doubt the hours will be filled, and time may not

seem to languish and repine, but friends and strangers are different, you know full well, and an idle hour can't be so well filled in with strangers as with our intimate friends." It was in his mouth to declare her chief among his "intimate friends," but wanted courage.

"I wish you a bon voyage, success in your work, and a speedy return to your native heath and intimate, well-wishing friends."

"Indeed it is kind of you to say so much, and I'm sure your kind words will be leaven to many dull, hard, heavy hours, busy as I may be."

"I see Olive Pendell coming. She is returning home to New York. You will fortunately have the company of Olive and her noble mother. For a few days they have been visiting Mrs. Pendell's sister, wife of a Congressman here."

Olive and her mother and Mrs. Wadsworth hurried up, greeted all, and then all joined in a half jesting, half laughing, general conversation. Peter Wilkins was as ever the clown of the talk, and his words and manners raised laughter above the din around.

"We are deporting our friend, the enemy, to his mother country, where we hope he will be reformed, refitted, returned to us in proper shape and proportions and with the proper heraldic emblems, or tags, upon him, lest he stray, be lost, or stolen."

The allusion to titles and titular distinctions provoked Mina to gurling laughter, almost boisterous. Olive and her mother joined Mina, primarily in sympathy and secondarily at the mirth-provoking facial contortions of the

comedian. To see him, one was led to think his utterance rent him in twain.

"It will delight us to have you with us in our journey," said Mrs. Pendell.

"And I deem it fortunate that you are going now," said the Professor in inviting tones and terms.

"Lovely that you can all go together," said Mrs. Wadsworth.

"We are sending the Professor abroad, as Mr. Peter Wilkins has said, and we hope,—indeed know,—his mission for the government will result to his honor and the great good of the whole American people," said ex-Senator Wadsworth.

"A good man for any consular, diplomatic, or investigating service," said Peter in emendation of his previous remark.

"We may congratulate you on your appointment to so worthy and significant matter," said Olive, looking intently on him. She was in doubt about the appositeness of her remarks, and looked to see.

"I always have faith in the words and counsel of my friends," said Prof. P. Thomas Nelson seriously, "but an enemy may tell the truth on the other side of the matter, for everybody like every question, story, recorded historical fact, or quarrel, has two sides. A written historical fact is one man's statement, and may differ as does the testimony of litigants in court. But you, my best friends, always tell the truth." He laughed. He was not puffed up.

"You should not intimate there is another side to our words, Professor," said Peter.

"Why not?"

"Now, why not!" interrupted Peter.

"Why not? I do not stumble for an instant as to the truth of what you say. It flatters me, and hence must be true, you know. But there is always the possibility of somebody else saying a different thing, giving the other side." The Professor smiled in proof of his sanity and sincerity.

"Well, we shall never doubt you," said Mina, half blushing.

"I never doubt you, but I do doubt myself," said the Professor.

"A Daniel! A Daniel! A nice distinction. We accept it all now," said Peter perfectly recalcitrant.

"You are personal," said Mrs. Wadsworth coming to the Professor's aid.

"A proper time to be," said Peter.

Then the engine bell rang three taps, like ember bells, the conductor came up and suggested that they enter the coach, good-bys were quickly said, hurried shakes of hands, Mina kissed Olive and her mother in tender adieu, and Mrs. Wadsworth was the last to grasp the Professor's hand, except her daughter. The Professor lingered perceptibly over Mina's hand, clasped it a little harder, held it closely a little longer, and then without a word dropped it, entered the coach, and sat in the reversed seat with Mrs. and Miss Pendell.

"And he had said no more!" Mina reflected as she heard the train depart.

And Nero Pensive now had the whole, cleared op-

portunity to captivate and capture the great heiress. What a great find she was.

The Professor was departing abroad with no promise from her, except that he might write all he wished, and that she possibly might miss him,—not absolutely sure of that. Undeclared love is a mystery, a torture, an infidelity! Possibly she might be married before his return. She said she would probably be in Europe before he returned, and that might mean as the wife of a titled lord. It could mean that. There was no reason he knew why it shouldn't. And why might he not write her his whole heart secret. He would.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE next day, soft and gentle after the mild rain the night previous, was a splendid time for automobiling, and Nero Pensive had arranged to ride with Mina. She was real sorry Olive Pendell had gone home, but Mrs. Wadsworth, in the excellency of her motherly spirit, said she would accompany her. She promised to sit with Mina, who proposed to drive the car, and thus oblige Nero Pensive to occupy a rear seat alone. In the last minute, luckily, unluckily, Clarissa and Alice passed by, and paused to say they were just walking to the White House for a breath of release and recreation and ozone,—not the liquid kind. Why—they would be extremely delighted to ride with them.

Again Nero was defeated,—worse, a Sedan! The Erinnyes seemed to have, in some inexplicable manner, turned the favor of his lares et penates to naught, since his advent in America. But, was it Timour that received the lesson of achievement from the ant? Then he would know no defeat. This time,—then the next time. There was surely another time; this time was not final. Nature did not arrange to focus all things in one final mighty effort, and then cease. Again,—again,—and still again! The Professor was now absent, and he would be free to continue, accentuate, accumulate his impressions and designs upon her, without the interference of another,

who would wofully confuse, and even erase, each last soul impression he should make upon her clean, white, unsuspecting heart, clean as Lock's sheet of white paper.

So mother and daughter rode in front and the two girls, his bitterest enemies, in the seat with him. He could not back out. They did not object to this arrangement, after each had exchanged in secret a wink with the other. He dare not refuse to go, for that would give them the very opportunity they sought to reveal him to Mina. He knew her mind so far had not been poisoned by them. And moreover, it would confirm their story. It would require all the "sweetness and love and light" that Arnold talked about to go now, but since it was a "condition and not a theory that confronted him" it remained only for him to do it. He must deceive Clarissa and Alice as to his feelings, win them with charming, medieval-like gallantry, and intercept and prevent any tales out of school.

They swept through the air all over the surrounding country, the rush of the quivering, jolting machine interfering with protracted conversation. And Mina was, by her responsibility at the steering-wheel, deprived of participation in the broken talk.

Alice told the story of a husband's bad blunder over the "phone." When he returned home in the evening, his wife met him with lugubrious tones, saying the hired girl had given notice to quit according to the union contract. The husband asked for the reason. The wife told him that the girl said he had spoken to her in a brutal manner over the telephone. Then he explained with

brutal frankness that he thought he was speaking to his wife.

Clarissa matched it by the answer to the query about the author's new typewriter. He said she was not new ; was second hand,—a widow.

Nero laughed, thinking of nothing else he could do. They were not side-splitting, button-bursting stories, but they had a dagger in them for him.

Clarissa was obliged to sit cramped next to him. Alice had such a horror of the fellow she could not be induced to sit near him. The fear fairly burnt in her eccentric soul. He had endeavored to kidnap her. This man, the Ron Cornwallis of a mad escapade not long ago, seemed enveloped in an atmosphere that she imagined pervaded pandemonium or purgatory.

Then, in the exchange and interchange of the mental flashes, the result of the natural function of the brain, which always thinks and feels, whether expressed or defined in terms or not, it flashed upon Clarissa to quote an idea from "*La Vie Parisienne*." It was a modern French view of before and after marriage, and was illustrated. Before marriage the man, sitting on the sofa with his true love, is large, all-powerful, immense, superior. His blushing, meek, humble, frail fiancée is a squeaking little mousie on the opposite corner of the sofa. But after the wedding the conditions are reversed. The new hubby is diminutive, small, smaller, smallest, infinitesimally small, and the great big new bride on the other end of the sofa is absolute queen. In reciting this she modulated her voice, always sweetly musical, like a tune, so sweet and gurgling. And in saying this of her present method of

speech, there is still something left unsaid. She was sarcastically lovely in silvery intonation, and she garnished her words with a tantalizing smile. She did not demand a responsive sentiment, but she straightened out a fold of her modish walking suit. Alice looked at her, and better understood the psychic cruelty of her speech and manner.

She managed to make the whole trip most villainously uncomfortable for him, though he professed by word and laughter to be "enjoying it hugely."

They had spent the better part of the afternoon whirling over the country round about the City of Magnificent Distances, and after all nothing was furthered in the plans of Nero. And happily nothing had been disclosed to his disadvantage. For this he felt a sort of stupefied satisfaction; and as for the rest he would disclaim all previous knowledge of these girls and maintain that it is a crass conspiracy to blackmail him.

They arrived in the city as the street gas lights were being lighted and the arc lights were being turned on. The chef had a bountiful, dinner prepared, and had waited some time. With becoming appetites they sat to table like charming friends. And neither Mina nor Mrs. Wadsworth knew they were not the best of friends. Clarissa all this time was still known to them as Miss I. Single.

Clarissa was a woman, however, in whom desperation had dawned, out of the bitterness and mistakes of her past. She had reached the point where she suffered. None should escape who had harmed her. But her friends forever!

After all had eaten heartily, in response to the calls of the afternoon outing, Clarissa, a strange light born of desperation in her eyes, a voice that was calm and deep and musical, an air that would dare and die, turned to Nero Pensive, the only man at the table, and said:

"I very much dislike masquerades and masks."

He looked up sharply. Instinct told him this meant something. Mina comprehended nothing but that her words were enigmatical. Mrs. Wadsworth scarcely looked up. Alice was intensely alert. "I now here purpose to pull the domino off my friend 'Earl' Nero Pensive's face and expose him in the game he is putting up."

Mina and her mother looked in confusion. What could it be! The girl spoke as if she were going to make a scene. And they abominated scenes. Nero comprehended. He would forestall her.

"I have known this woman only since I came to this city, never before. She is no friend of mine. She is bent on defaming me for money. Let me say, much as I regret it, that this is not her first attempt. I shall claim the protection of the court, and meanwhile content myself by declaring my complete innocence."

"We shall see," Clarissa went on in a very damaging, matter-of-fact, declarative manner. "Telephones and telegraphs bring within immediate reach every land under the sun, and statements can be verified. He married me in Paris, and thought he had arranged a mere ruse marriage. But I countered that, and we were married legally, though he knew it not then; and are to-day by law husband and wife. I'm sure you will recall, Miss

Wadsworth, when he left me in Paris, playing opera on the stage."

"I now for the first time have placed you," said Mina in surprise. "All along I thought I had known you before. Your changed name disguised you." The look of marvel and astonishment on her mother's face is easier imagined than depicted. The altered name had an ugly look. But it was necessary in order to steal upon Nero; otherwise he would shun the name he knew.

"I never knew this woman previous to my coming to this city," he said now white, now red, now quivering with anger. Mina looked appalled. She was disposed to credit him. Upon general principles his word was as credible as hers. But what an awful affair this was! What was not this Clarissa Harlow guilty of! Mrs. Wadsworth's first impression was that they had harbored a snake in their home. She was not the woman she allowed her conduct to profess her to be. She was a masque herself. And she actually looked stern and frowned at her. The publicity of this unsavory story would necessarily couple them with it in no pleasant fashion, one might be sure. Should it produce a rowen—

"And since he came to this country, he married my friend, Alice Moore-Greenfield in New York City, and that is more easily verifiable, if you think I am making reckless accusations."

"I never knew them before I met them in this city, and here these characterless things thrust their infamous presence on me *nolens volens*."

"It is true he married me on a 'lark,' under the assumed name of Ron Cornwallis, in New York. I have

much proof that this is Ron Cornwallis,—the Justice of the Peace and some of my best friends. Indeed when I came here I knew no other name for him. And I can't even now testify of my own knowledge what his real name is." Alice spoke in considerable agitation and angry excitement.

"I always quote Scripture when I'm mad," he said, a classically imperturbable smile coiling like a venomous serpent on his lips. "And I say now, 'depart from me into everlasting fire; I never knew you.' You know this, too, better than anybody," appealing directly to her, "that you first met me in this city at the station on my first arrival."

"First met you there in *this* city—yes. That is not the point material to this issue. The issue is that you and I were married in New York by a civil magistrate, and that I left you at once, leaving you alone on the steps of the office of the Justice of the Peace. Then, the spirit that prompted my wild vagary had expended itself, and so I would no more of you, an entire stranger." Alice had spoken the entire truth, though Mina and her mother were not without doubts. Alice was very nervous.

"Mrs. Wadsworth and Miss Wadsworth," he began, turning to them a face radiant with well-trained smiles, "I deplore this dreadful scene here in your lovely home, where peace long was wont to dwell undisturbed. This infamous assault on my pure character is not settled; but here is not the place to settle it. I shall unequivocally demonstrate to you that I never knew these upstart women; that they are trumping up this stuff for the pur-

pose of blackmailing me; and that it is one of the most unholy conspiracies ever concocted."

"We are truly sorry that you people should differ in the manner you do," said Mrs. Wadsworth with acute sadness of tone.

"These young ladies were my associates, mere acquaintances first formed a week or ten days ago at Atlantic City, and I must say I was charmed with their engaging vivacity, and candid manners, and lovely personality," said Mina directing her remarks specially at them, prompted by a sense of self-defense. It was a very discreditable affair, to say the very least, in which she was but incidentally concerned, and so no apology was due from her, she knew.

"Mrs. Wadsworth, we are not concealing anything from you," said Clarissa. "Nor are we imposing upon you or deceiving you for an unworthy end, or for any end for that matter. And we have sacrificed ourselves, though we were not obliged to confess and criminate ourselves. But I have proposed, for the sake of the truth and to save your pure, sweet girl, to let you know who this man is, his purpose in deceiving you and your daughter, and to prove to you the truth of what I am saying. I am honest with you, whatever he is. He has a mark stamped on his left arm. He will not show it now. How do I know this mark is there, if I never saw him before we met in this city."

"I need not now convict her out of her own mouth by showing an arm without a spot or blemish upon it. This is her ruse to support her false words."

"It is an unpleasant affair to me, and I can easily see

it is passion-tense with you," said Mrs. Wadsworth in placating tones.

"I had learned to 'like' you girls exceedingly, and I'm truly sorry for all this," said Mina briefly, kindly.

"As to that, this is but a result of what was to come," said Clarissa in a manner that exhibited an implacable spirit toward Nero, and that said more in its essence to prove her position than her words; and also showed that this feud was not of recent contrivance. "We were at the watering place, because that was a part of the plan to trap this 'Earl.' Miss Wadsworth will recall that I catechised her there about him, and alluded to her diamond ring and an engagement. I am sorry that your peaceful home, your lovely spirited domestic retreat, has become the scene of any portion of this ugly life drama, which has at least one act and several scenes more before it is ended."

"You see in this statement, Mrs. Wadsworth, what I have to contend with from these two adventuresses," he said turning abstractly his silver spoon end over end on the immaculate table linen. Once it fell over and jangled upon the china, as if it had caught the spirit of the moment and had begun to "raise a fuss" on its own behalf and assault the plate and quarrel loudly. Mrs. Wadsworth did not answer him. Instead, she patted the napkin twice. He stood as little exonerated in her mind as the two young ladies did, and Mina viewed the unseemly, improper affair with a real sense of shame and regret. She remembered what her father said in Paris about titled young men. And then, too, there was always an inexplicable inner sense opposing him. He now sank lower in her opinion.

"I can not suggest anything to you," said Mrs. Wadsworth at length, brushing a crumb from the linen. "I indeed regret the unfortunate, inconsiderate affair for your sakes."

"Pray do not let this weary or worry you, my dear Mrs. Wadsworth," said Nero with modulated palaver and an assumed superiority to it all and therefore a right to assure and comfort these distressed mother and daughter. "I promise you shall never hear more of it. But I also promise to clear myself of it all, and you shall know it."

"He called you 'my dear Mrs. Wadsworth!' Well said!" cried Clarissa in assumed pleasantry.

"I shall now retire and end this distressing, shameful quarrel, none of which is by my wish," said he.

"No, of course not. Not your wish! But your accursed deeds made it possible," Clarissa sneered.

"Go, bigamist!" cried Alice after him as he bowed out of the dining-room.

Mina as host felt it a civil duty to attend him out of the house. In the large drawing-room, when alone, he turned and appealed to her, a well-wrought wrinkle of distress on his low brow, and with consummate effrontery, or daring perhaps, to be literally just to him, he seized her hand, begging her:

"O, Miss Wadsworth, the scandal and shame and dishonor of this moment is the bane of my life, and I shall never recover from the great shock of the disgrace. Pray, Miss Wadsworth, do not render a verdict on the testimony of the one side only. Courts never do. There are two sides to every case, you well know. This is a proposition too simple to state. I shall not trouble you

here now with my side, and mine is the true version, I assure you; but at your pleasure,— let me tell you the facts at your pleasure. Name your hour.” His eyes, with that uncertain hue of purple mingling in the gray sometimes seen in them, rested on her without reserve, not in appeal but in saugine deliberation watching the effect of his false words.

“I will notify you when.”

“It is a pure, genuine case of blackmail. But I will say no more now.” And with wise reticence in his dilemma he departed. His last act was to accord her the smile civil.

She returned to the dinning-room where the painful explanation still went on. There were animated repetitions of the story of this man, and not a little reprobation interlarded with it. Mina sat down to listen and to think. Perhaps the true spirit of the story would arise out of the things she might hear. And so she sat quietly, almost reticently, at an end of the table.

Mrs. Wadsworth, a true Christian woman, moved with a spirit of helpfulness and well doing, considered the problem of these two harum-scarum girls. On the side of social relationship, it were best to cast out these wayward creatures and let them drift. While she listened something definite came out of the formless void. There is something great and good in them, as there is in everybody, opportunity given, and therefore as a Christian she must not only set herself to the work but actually save them. They can be saved, as can all persons, opportunity given. Therefore she can not dismiss them from her home. The good can not be harmed by accretion but by concretion.

They are misguided women, and needed above all things the shelter of a shutter, and the protection of an arm. Condemnation would not give them these things. That was not Christs' method with the Magdalenes. The belief she entertained was that these girls were not lawless and guilty, but wild and uncontrolled, needing reconstruction less than warm love. There was every hope for them. They had simply become hardened and glazed in resisting opposition. Perpetual opposition is perpetual condemnation. Abuse is a failure as a method of reformation.

In this day of divorces, Mrs. Wadsworth reflected in substance, there is some cause for marital unhappiness. Could these girls have helped being frivolous-minded in love-making. It's possible for every one to love and be loved correctly. Or is it fate? The lightness of the very inception of love attachments and courting associations is a chief cause of divorces. The untaught young, obeying impulse, don't understand the great God-design of love,—the perpetuity of the race. Love is one—no, is *the*—strongest passion or impulse given to man, next to the desire to eat which preserves life. And it is a divine decree, this union of the sexes. But disregarding all, they meet, flirt, smile, marry, and repent at leisure in sackcloth and ashes. In America, the wife has a larger place in life, than she does in England, where she by custom is under the dominance of her husband.

"These girls," she decided, "must find a cordial welcome in my home, that is all. They need a mother's heart over them, and I must supply that place."

They arose from the table.

CHAPTER XXX

THE man Nero Pensive was a skillful sinner, an adept in sly, cunning ways "like the heathen Chinees," and a polished libertine, though an "Earl." His title rather than his character was his social salvation.

He still had the refining air of sweet women upon him, having just left the dwelling of ex-Senator Wadsworth in the manner pointed out, when his mind, long-trained in the ways of wickedness rather than the ways of pleasantness and paths of peace, devised a scheme of revenge. If it was their purpose, deep-laid and devilish, to interpose and defeat his obtaining the beautiful and sensible Miss Wadsworth, he would scruple at nothing to "get even" with them.

It became necessary then first to have a conference with Mith Gulliver. In this conference he disclosed these latest facts to him, whose delight was to spy upon the ways of others, a self-imposed work of infamy, and have none spy upon him. But it can be written many times that "it repented the Lord that he had made man upon the earth;" so perhaps the Lord needed assistance to help him watch and to keep him informed of the wicked ways of wicked men.

Mith Gulliver, devoid of a trained sense of fine moral distinctions, undertook this nefarious work with no cheap expressions of delight. He was zealous in the matter,

for it gratified his base nature. It is said that it takes a mean man to understand readily and fully the meanness of others. Mith had the necessary qualifications.

According to the base-born scheme, as soon as possible two villains were set to shadowing Clarissa and Alice, with the purpose of secretly gaining entrance to their rooms and concealing themselves therein. Base, "mean,"—could anything be worse! Through the assistance of Mith Gulliver policemen were to be steered there, then, at a late hour, and search the rooms. The concealed men and the two unsuspecting girls were to be conveyed to headquarters, locked up in dishonor and shame, and when court convened in the morning by public trial and exposure they would be found "guilty." The press would then supplement their downfall and degradation. The two "weary Willies," taken with the disgraced, unhappy girls, would be fined, and paid out, and ordered to "move on." The scheme was deep and probable.

Two "fellows" were easily secured for this scandalous, scoundrelly work, the noble plan of the gentlemanly "Earl." Ready cash for little service procures men for anything. It was small labor for the purchase of "much money,"—money bought cheaply.

Time and opportunity were required. The villains could not defeat their plan by exceeding haste. It was no easy thing to enter the home of the ex-Senator undiscovered at any time, because of its location and its servants. But it required expedition, for it was understood, at least so noted in the public press, that Mrs. Wadsworth and her daughter and "visitors" were on the

eve of departing for some cool mountain resort, perhaps White Springs in Virginia.

The criminal "fellows" hung around the ex-Senator's "mansion" day and night studying the house and possible ways of secretly entering and hiding. Guilt is always on guard. The guilty must necessarily be quick-witted as well as have long memories. The noble "Earl" grew impatient at the delay of his hired rascals. Then he grew furious, and heaped the muck of angry adjectives over Mith, just as all small-minded people do to those under their momentary anger.

Now it was discovered through the sagacious Mith that the two young ladies were no longer in the Wadsworth home. This was a circumstance that seemed providential to the innocent girls. It seemed to defeat the diabolical scheme of the noble "Earl," and he swore about it. However, he had not abandoned the plan.

Young America is not going the way its fathers trod, neither is it asking whether the fathers were right or wrong. Little respect is entertained for the opinions of the older, time-worn, dusty, aged ones. To-day the theory is that the newer generation must be swayed by their own sufficient ideas, just as the older ones were by their own self-developed ideas. The old are recreant to progress when they endeavor to bind the newer to effete ideas and customs. So the older ones are distressed and declare the newer are going after strange gods. What is new to the older is not necessarily made false by calling it the vagaries of nonsense. The trivialities of the hour are consumptive by birth and soon perish. Indeed it is impossible to energize nothing.

But Clarissa and Alice, through the motherly merits of Mrs. Wadsworth and the sisterly spirit of Mina, were ready to give up their wild, girlish life and call Mrs. Wadsworth mother and Mina sister. They would put away for ever, they said, the misleading young American spirit and live true, clean lives, in which there should not be even the shadow of the appearance of evil. This was very gratifying to Mrs. Wadsworth.

One evening, not far from ten o'clock, a splendidly practiced feminine voice floated out like ideal notes from a lovely cottage in a quiet street. The tones arose in mellow quavers and immersed the square in cultivated sounds. A young American passing by set up a tentative whine, in imitation of a dog baying at the moon, a dismal howl imitated by other dogs, a howl that some regard as a superstition pointing to a death in the family,—a premonitory moaning. Dogs so howl often when great bells ring, or whistles blow, or musical instruments play.

Mith Gulliver, in execution of the delights of his being to prowl about the streets at night, heard the howl of the young-blooded American. It impressed the keen-sensed person as devoid of the sense of respect and full of the social iconoclastic sense. Mith sneaked up and astonished the young fellow with the curt question of what he was doing. The young fellow didn't know, except the music set the dog in him to howling.

"I haven't evolved fully yet, I suspect, and this howling may be the 'call of the wild,' or something we haven't found words for yet," said the young man solemnly.

"I say—"

"That young girl there in the brightly beaming cottage singing an Italian song,—don't you hear her?—made me feel like baying at the moon. Now don't she sing like the dying swan, or the nightingale, or something?"

"By Ned!" cried Mith in gleeful surprise. The young American did not comprehend. He conceived that Mith, a stranger to him, had been stunned by the sweet music into demented silence. So the young fellow silently stole away, leaving Mith standing in a straining and listening attitude.

Clarissa Harlow played delightfully, and her modulated, well-trained, lovely voice seemed a gift from heaven. The pleasure of the discovery, the soft night, and the magic notes made him listen, and the sweet sounds rioted through his lumberous being. And, too, through the open window he saw Clarissa Harlow, seated in song at the well-toned piano and singing till her throat quavered in ecstasies, and Alice Moore-Greenfield. He pondered,—in his manner. And was this providence that he should find the lost before he had lost them! What better place than this retired place!

In turning away, elated at the information, he muttered to himself. It was not true, what he was telling his credulous self. He was flattering his ego by saying what a shrewd nose he had for villainy. (True. But he meant for smelling out villainy of others). He laid the flattering unction to his fat-witted soul that he was a fine specimen of humanity, one of nature's noblemen, and he had no doubt in his soft soul that he should ere long be associated with the Scotland Yards,—as soon as he returned to London.

In the next moment he was made to consider another phase of the affair, no hint of which had crossed the cloudy horizon of his intellect. At the street-corner, in the flickering arc light, he ran squarely into Dean McBarron, who paused and accosted him. Mith was off guard for moment in the sudden piquancy of his surprise. He stammered, and for an instant his tongue refused to lie promptly.

There was a bit of trivial talk, not conversation, between them, nothing relevant to the matter uppermost in their minds; and yet each knew something for certain that lay vivified in the other's mind. Dean knew why Mith was there, and Mith knew that his detection there by Dean was a straw that would make their game harder. It would entail a delay, for one thing, and might result in defeat, in the end. And Dean was made to suspect that some secret plot was on foot, in which he mingled that "gay English lad." They separated, and the footsteps of each were heard far along the night-forsaken street.

After the song Clarissa said to Alice:

"I think Mrs. Wadsworth charming."

"And to give us this lovely furnished cottage, because she said she wished to be good to us," said Alice. "She is real motherly."

"This is a charming situation and sweet for its novelty and isolation, after being in the thickest of the stir for years. I'm tired of notoriety and the infamy that attends it. Nothing to it." And Clarissa lounged into a comfortable Morris-chair and sighed, closing her eyes and

thinking for a weak instant of her long-ago childhood home.

Ah, heaven! what she had lived since then! And where had she arrived in the journey of life! God alone knew. The beauties of her childhood were colorless and dead, and what remained of her life did not seem worth living. There she was now, descended from all her greatness, gone into obscurity from which there was no escape now her opportunity being wasted, and regret had perched like a raven on the bust of Pallas on the mantel of her heart. Cardinal Woolsey, an ambitious man without settled principles, knew the deadly pangs of regret, that hades of the soul. It does not pay to err. There is a hidden viper in every sin, as sure as fate, as sure as cause and effect, as sure as God and life. There is no escape from the result, the cause once set in motion. The effects can't be bribed off, given away, diverted, averted, frightened off, prayed off, cried off by penance, repented off; they must come as the natural operation of cause. Life lived out, is ended forever, and can't be recalled and lived over and amended. It stands to the judgment day as lived, and the history of it is written upon the memory, and can't be rewritten to suit a wish born of regret. But God is infinite and merciful, and it is safe to appeal to him and ask his protection and direction. God is love.

"Are you sleeping?" Alice inquired when she noticed Clarissa's silence and closed eyes. Alice had just teased a sweet morsel of Chopin out of the grand piano, before she observed Clarissa.

"Yes—no! And dreaming of the olden. Regrets,

that's all." Clarissa even wiped away a tear that swelled over the rims.

"It seems," said Alice with a dim sense of what Clarissa's mood was, and a less desire to enter into it, "that Ron Cornwallis is denying all his past villainy for the sake of Miss Wadsworth."

"Money—money is what he is after. He is the greatest spendthrift in the world. I had money almost without stint or limit before him; after him—the panic. He's been my Nemesis." Clarissa was never very happy in her relations with him, though for a short time he was nearly infatuated with her. "Once he said I was the only pebble on the beach. But there are others now. Truth to tell, the man is not normal. He has lived a life that submitted to his *wishes*, and as I know by bitter experience *wishes* are not a very intelligent agent in the government of life."

"I believe you are sad," laughed Alice, and in pure youthful buoyancy, that did things before thought could rub its hazy eyes to see what was going on, she pirouetted once around Clarissa. These two girls were being intertwined in a strange friendship.

"No—yes. 'Tis ever thus now when I think of him," said Clarissa. "I made a great mistake when I married the 'Earl.' But a title then had its charms for me. Now it has its charms, I fear, for Miss Wadsworth. Life is full of mistakes, and I fear Miss Wadsworth will make this fatal mistake. And he is making a strenuous effort for her money. He thinks he needs it—not she. But he can't get it without the girl thrown in, you know. He is not brave enough to be a Raffles. He deserted me for

her purse, and I have now turned my attention also to the girl. I'm going to save her if I can, for I love the pure, sweet thing. He shall not gain his daring, low-born purpose there." She sprang up. "I defy him." Then with feminine inconsistency for a little while she fairly raved. It was possible to "best" him, and she would. Mina should not be made the victim of his cold-blooded scheme of hold-up. He should not ruin another single life for money, the "trash" of Shakespere, the "filthy lucre" of the Bible. His life is not worth the hard cash it costs to "run it." His life was an enterprise that would serve just as good purpose in the other world,—if "moved up in the back seat of the heavenly auditorium when God sermonized on Sunday mornings." Clarissa's sense of religion was that the "select" were a morbid class of visionists, and so her remark corresponded to her opinion of religion. She, like very many, was not cognizant how ignorant she was in religious philosophy, and yet like most professing religious people she thought she had the very germ core of it and could not therefore be far wrong. To her, as to too many in this frivolous age of human development, religion had become so altered and reformed, that it was a mere adulterated religion, and some had distorted it into a morbid piety, into an egotistical manifestation, into an emotional rather than an intellectual religion, or a proper union of the two.

"You know, Clarissa, that our beautiful friendship has one common tie now, that we knew not of when we came here, and that binds us to one common purpose," said

Alice seating herself on Clarissa's lap, with a little flourish of a titter.

"Two—two purposes: to beat Nero, and to save Mina," cried Clarissa. Alice again stood up.

Dean witnessed the actions of the girls, and it seemed but pantomime. Believing himself the only spectator, the scene gave him a sense of satisfaction that he could not interpret. He resolved the situation into a condition that made his guardianship a necessity, so he remained there.

But out and beyond the scope of his view was another watchman, with an entirely different purpose. He saw both Dean and the girls—Mith Gulliver.

At length the lights went out in the cottage, and the girls slept.

That noble woman, Mrs. Wadsworth, visited these girls daily, saw to their reading and outings and amusements and company and living, and made their altered and retired life enticing enough to wish to continue in it. What she feared most was that this correct form of life would eventually pall upon them and they would break away from it in lawless desire to have the stimulus of the old. But at all events she would see what she could do for them, this human driftwood that had floated into her care, and she was satisfied the effort would be worth while; for no truly good force once entered into a life as a motive is ever entirely displaced by the rag-tag elements of the emotional side of the human personality. Mina was a sister to them in many ways. Not a day was omitted in which she did not, in some sweet way, figure in their lives. She was to them like ballast. They

came to love her as the sweetest and dearest girl on earth, and were ready to yield everything to her,—a supreme test of true friendship. Love—love! how great a force it is in the shaping of human destiny. It is the great law opposed to selfishness. The Edenic serpent has apotheosized selfishness—dirt! The unpalatable truth is that it rules in the conclusions of much modern so-called philosophy. It is self that seeks to divert dollars from the channels of business into one's own coffers. It is self that controls the home regardless of the wishes or comforts or aims of the rest. It is self that arranges the program of the day with the perpendicular personal pronoun first and last and all through. It is self that wants to get to heaven by any hook or crook or back-stairway, whatever happens to the rest of the human family. It is self that seeks "affinity," repudiates the old and adopts the new, which after all is not different from the old when it was new; it is when all is told human love still, purely animal, notwithstanding the characterization of "soul choice," which is false. Such "affinities" whine that they are "soul-weary, illusioned, comfortless." This "affinity" fraud is the game of weak, freakish people. The man in the case too often has subdued his first sweet, meek-souled wife by a sort of domestic cowboy method, and he dominates her like a whip-cracking cowherd. And on the other hand the wife forgot that Eve did not worry the life out of Adam by asking him every hour in the day whether she was the only woman he ever loved. These "affinity dodgers" regard themselves as a sort of select lot of God's daily output of stunts in manufacturing the human species,—a manufactory with a marvelous ca-

capacity for variation and quantity. This select lot "Kiboshes" all who are not followers of the next-to-nature theory; which being interpreted into common sense is the selfish doctrine of "I wish;" not what the "other fellow wishes;" but "I." Then a few believe in the shredded-wheat-biscuit stamp of love. It is true, in the shortsightedness of humanity, men and women are not always competent to select and make proper marriage combinations. The old farmer expressed the idea very well to his long limber-tongued wife: "My lands, woman, you've got too much fire and too little sense to live agreeably with any man." That is to say, her irascible nature would lead her into an unhappy life, no matter with whom she associated.

These ideas dragged themselves in a more temperate and mild form through the kindly heart of Mrs. Wadsworth. But no one knew better, that she was powerless to regulate the source of human ills in this regard. However, her weakness was not an apology for attempting nothing for the reformation of that which lay at her feet. A noble confidante and cooperator was her daughter, whose experiences, however, were drawn chiefly from college observations. But Mina had abundant and continued reasons for thanking her stars that her destiny fell under the ascending lode star of such pleasant domestic environments. And then she also thanked God for his wisdom in the selection of her parents. Parents are both destiny and environment.

And the society gossips in the public press were boldly saying that it was first-class rumor that Miss Wadsworth and Earl Nero Pensive were engaged. Mina knew not

the source of this very annoying publicity of what was not true. Clarissa Harlow better understood the motives for such vulgarizing publicity, and she attributed it to Nero. He naturally would have a motive for it; no one else. It is strictly correct to say that Mina was not pleased at the rumors put forth in cold-blooded type. The rumors were so deftly worded as not to compromise her in the statement, but they annoyed her sense of self-respect. They did not produce teasing that provoked fretfulness, not excite smiles that had unsavory hints, not appear fulsomely flattering, not disparage in word or intimation, and therefore she could not declare she was hurt by them—only annoyed.

Then came a mid-ocean wireless message to her, two days after Prof. P. Thomas Nelson had departed, stating that they were making record speed and would reach Liverpool on schedule time, provided, etc. She easily supplied the possible proviso. As soon as he landed at Liverpool he cabled his arrival. These were facts that in some way came to Nero's attention and annoyed him not a little.

And when he called one day, he said he had seen a brief mention in a daily paper that Prof. Nelson had arrived in England. He affected to have said an indifferent thing, but carefully noted her consciousness of his knowledge of this fact. He was not satisfied with the affect upon her mind, and added that he understood the public was indebted for the information not through the press alone but through her directly. He understood no such thing. The information came by cable from the European press association. And still he had developed no clew to lead him

to construe anything favorable to himself. This was positively provoking. He merely tapped the window lace with his index finger, as if he were thrusting a dagger into it, looked steadily at her standing at a respectful distance, and urged insistently, as he had done more than once before,—

“Miss Wadsworth, will you not at least give me the privilege of the general custom of your great country, that of calling you by your Christian or baptismal name?” He had his motive for using the phrase, “Christian or baptismal name.”

“Will you be seated,” ignoring his time-honored, wearying plea.

“Thanks. No.—You evade me. O, I can’t think the evasion means a state of your heart uncharitable to me. I will not think it. I can’t believe the infamous scheme to defeat me in your esteem—only that and nothing else could turn you from me—can weigh a feather’s weight with a girl of so sane and level and comprehensive judgment as you possess, and as all admit belongs to you by divine right.”

And so he went on. While he talked, the damaging stories to his reputation and character took a blacker tint in her mind. She answered smoothly and gently:

“I hope you will bring evidence of some kind to me to prove the real meaning you have in all you say so easily and readily about your fondness for me. This is certainly due me.” This was not a diplomatic response, but it was what she had wanted to state to him for some time. “You tell me your side of the case, the defendant’s side, all you can do, to be sure, and I’m not demanding proofs that

it is true as words ordinarily mean, or saying by word or intimation that I do not believe you, or that your offer does not flatter me, and all such easy and logical inferences; but I simply beg at present that you will not demand a statement or affidavit giving you my views of how I feel and stand in my estimation of myself toward you. Pray, regard this as conclusive for the present."

She turned and sat down in the nearest chair. Now that she had spoken, and reached the central, core-point in the affair, she was, on consideration, quite willing now to discuss the case *ad libitum*, or at least at length. The mind and heart are puzzles that will and will not, that can and can not, that wish to and do not wish to, and they at times amaze themselves with their inconsistencies. But what she said affected him like an ice-pack and he closed up like a clam. He sat down in polite echo of her act, however neither one in a Chesterfieldian spirit or the manner of Count Castiglione.

She did exhume the strain of thought she had buried by her smooth frankness, and he seemed to have no tears for the dead subject she had "put a quietus on." So he, in that light airy manner that speaks and purposes not, rambled into unclassical jungles of social chitchat, in which he was a skillful traveler.

But it was observable that he made no profession of what he would do, and the fact was patent to Mina. She could not base a conclusion on this that he purposed to do nothing. Experience teaches that those who declare the least perform the best.

After a time he very graciously took his departure.

CHAPTER XXXI

THEY went out upon the hills beyond, one day, to play tennis, Clarissa, Alice, Mina, Peter Wilkins, Clever Hesperus, and Mrs. Wadsworth, ever a willing and cheerful soul where young people's wishes were at stake.

It was an old tennis court, much used by those out on the hills for a day. The enjoyment was sweet to all.

A splendid lunch was in the motor-car, and when the meridian hour came all declared, not in exact language, except Clever Hesperus, that they were as hungry as wolves. And no one is foolish enough to venture an opinion about the possibilities of young, play-whetted appetites. And good, lovable, broad-dealing Mrs. Wadsworth entered into every jest, and every laugh, and every wish of the prime young people, in such spirit that all said she was as young as the youngest and prettiest there. The vagaries of young minds are best admired when unexplained. The light of analysis hurts their whimsicalities, as it does some modern "scientific theories," which ere long find a melo-dramatic association among the ten-cent gang of books,—“scientific theories” which the irrepressible Peter Wilkins averred were put in language and “garbed in the fashion of day after to-morrow.” Peter was hopelessly beyond exegetics at times.

“Scientific language has about as clear and clever meaning as love language,” said Peter looking a hopelessly

blank look at Mina, while seated upon the grassy earth beneath a spreading tree, where all had gathered to lunch from an improvised table. Peter was reclining in the old Roman fashion, the rest sat on camp-chairs. It was a picnic meal in the primitive style. They discussed it substantially and searchingly, while the picnic wit went round like an infection. Clever Hesperus had not intended to be immune from the spirit of giddy gayety at this open-air festal board, but somehow he left the impression that he had been robbed of something by an exaggerated ego and by books, and for this reason he could not—simply could not—engage heartily in the influence and spirit of his surroundings. Much study had enveloped him in a stone wall of placidity and imperviousness.

“What do you know about love, Mr. Wilkins?” cried Alice, throwing out a frank, ringing laugh.

“I have made my friend, Miss Wadsworth, the custodian of all my information on that point,” he answered looking painfully sedate at a pickle in one hand and a bannana in the other, as if confidently debating the wisdom of such a food combination. And the experiments at Yale at the time of the enactment of the “Pure Food Law” by Congress haunted a dark corner of his quick-working intellect. “And moreover,” he added, “my views on this point are about as wise and satisfactory as a proxy marriage.” All shrieked but Peter himself, and it was more at his comic manner than his words or wit.

“You’ve no idea I was ever married by proxy?” Alice asked him.

“No, I’ve no idea,” he answered.

“An honest confession is good for the soul—I will so

modify the old saying," said Mrs. Wadsworth chirpingly.

"My confessions are all and always honest, but I beg you will not ask me to vouch for the honesty of the confessions of others," said Peter.

"That would be an omnibus, onerous task, you will allow me to avouch," said the well-meaning Clever Hesperus, but whose speech seemed somehow devoid of fire, and firmness, and cheeriness.

"I've just met Congressman John S. Foster, of Indiana, and his confidential private secretary, a noble young man," said Peter, "and they hold the same opinion that I do, that the ladies are the noblest beings in all the world, one step higher in the Darwinian sense of evolution than man himself, and certainly one step higher in the religious sense of unfolding heavenward."

"Thanks, Mr. Wilkins; a compliment less deserved, I assure you, than we desire it to be," said Mrs. Wadsworth.

Meanwhile Peter was making good use of the idle moment for his tongue and was demonstrating Kipling's assertion that America is a nation of pie-eaters.

"I think I may venture to say that Indiana's Senator, Beveridge, and Uncle Joe Cannon entertain similar views about the fair sex," said Clever Hesperus, looking with undisguised frankness at Clarissa and smiled at by Alice for his pains. But the smile neither added to nor took from the pleasure Clever found in his all absorbing look at the first woman who had ever stirred the slumbering fires in his desiccated heart long relegated to the dusts of desuetude. And the unfortunate thing was that his penchant for her was not based on reason, which he so

much doted on but which in the final test of his leaning and heart was cast to the idle winds, but he admired her, haltingly it is conceded, in spite of himself.

There are no bounds to the scope of picnic talk. In speaking of the "English Earl," Clarissa exceeded not the limits of temperate speech, for she well knew that intemperate remarks bring about not infrequently the reverse of what is desired. For a little, in this little circle of people on the hill Nero Pensive was in the storm-center, in the very lime-light of discussion.

"Indeed, I have no desire to go beyond what is true in his life," said Clarissa, brushing the last crumb from her gown after having eaten a sufficiency, the rest still nibbling mincingly and awaiting the ukase of the palate declaring enough. "I'm convinced, though I have but circumstantial proof that he is behind the public press notices of his pending marriage to Miss Wadsworth for a purpose—some scheme."

"Circumstances, may I beg to say in all candor, have hung many innocent men," said Clever Hesperus.

"And convicted many a guilty one," said Peter Wilkins hastily.

"And I *know* I married him, I confess with burning cheeks now, as Ron Cornwallis. The act nor name were honest on his part. I see villainy in both now, though I did not then."

Mina sat perfectly receptive. She was not disposed to defend him, nor to reprobate those saying ugly things of him.

And Mrs. Wadsworth had less to say than she was desirous of hearing. She had no qualms as to what her girl

would do in the case, though many mothers have misjudged their daughters who were swayed by emotion and not by reason, the two elements constituting in varying degree every human-divine compound. Her daughter, in whom she had the very best confidence, would not marry *one she did not know all about*,—his record and himself, both. But confident mothers have before now trusted to their sorrow. If God would only guide where motives are good!

"I know not the man, except his general appearance, which seems fleckless and flawless enough, I am sure." Peter quitted broad banality for a moment and occupied the wool-sack, so to speak, like Sancho Panza in judgment in his insular court.

"The testimony of Miss Harlow," said Mr. Exact Clever Hesperus, "is, *me judice*, sufficient to convict the greatest violator of the law."

"And I add my testimony to hers," said Alice with malice prepense.

"To be sure, let it be said, if we weigh to its fullest extent the cumulative and confirmatory evidence relating to the press notices, we are ready to pronounce judgment against him," said Clever Hesperus.

"Spoken like a Justinian, or his famous lawyer Tribonian," said Peter Wilkins. "With you, Sir Hesperus, I have no reason in the world to doubt the veracity of these witnesses, and would not if I had, so that we have made out a clear case against Nero Pensive, and should pronounce judgment and complete the court record."

Both Mina and Mrs. Wadsworth smiled at his conceit, and the others looked like people hesitating between

doubt and insult. But nobody could be insulted by Peter Wilkins. His nature was built on the liberal plan, and he was really larger than he seemed. There was sometimes more philosophy in his mirth than in his sobriety. He said he was a normal man, unlike the Pittsburgites, who have what is designated by the new phrase the alienists gave the gaping public—"brain storms,"—and unlike the Christian Scientists who repudiate pain because it is a scientific fact that may be upset by their theory.

"You may consider the evidence in any light you please, but I'm sure of it, and know that truth remains truth, though declared false in court," said Clarissa, as one declaring the finality of her opinion.

"And I can show the name, Ron Cornwallis, on the records of the Justice of the Peace in New York," said Alice.

"No doubt, but the court would demand the person who would own the name, not merely the statements of others as to who he is," said Peter.

"If I may speak legal matters, to the extent of my knowledge, I would say that two credible witnesses are all that is necessary for a proof," said Clever Hesperus juridically.

"That is the Biblical theory,—provided the witnesses are credible, as you say, and willing," said Peter.

"I know Nero Pensive," said Alice.

"And I know him," said Clarissa.

"But do you know Ron Cornwallis?" asked Peter in a simple fashion.

"No."

"But the Justice of the Peace does, and the Lovelace

girls, my friends, do," declared Alice with a triumphant smile.

"Verdict against him by jury without rising from their seats," said Peter.

Then all arose from the picnic table. The game was renewed. The afternoon flew with giddy haste into the limbo of the past. They were happily wearied, and life had an added zest because of their afternoon play-labor.

Some one said Miss Gladys Deacon once captured the heart of the crown-prince of Germany, but they dared not marry: social distinctions repudiated the love call of nature, as if human social distinctions were more to be observed than God's nature. Had Miss Deacon been the man in the case, so it is said, so that infallible Mrs. Gamp said, the girl would have been a merry wife in spite of all.

Then some one criticised Miss Alice Roosevelt Longworth, the lovely wife of that prince of good fellows, Nicholas Longworth, for wearing to the theatre one night a flaming red gown, cut extremely décolleté, especially in the back, and with no sleeves at all. This gown was not in the theatre custom in Washington society, and her position in the most conspicuous box in the theatre, the lower right hand one, caused many unmanageable and unrepeatable remarks to be made.

"Yes, I was present," said Mina, "and saw Mrs. Longworth. I admire her personality and her forceful individualism, and I think all the criticisms were at least a bit of meddlesome impertinence."

"I'm not a competent judge," Peter denied, but he was not above opinions nevertheless.

"I would say, not as a matter of opinion but as a mat-

ter of fact, that barbaric man delights in the next-to-nature garb," said the inoffensive Clever Hesperus.

But at length the day closed for them, and they skimmed the earth in an after-sunset ride home. It was a sensible, healthy, beautiful way of spending life, for a day if no more. The motive that sent these people out to the hills to play was different from that which sent the Decameron people into the forest; and they were different people and the manner of their lives differed. Peter declared with humorous emphasis that his knowledge of neologysm was insufficient to coin a new word to meet the exact state of pleasure of the day. Alice declared "it was out of sight." And Clarissa, not desiring to be in the school of the St. Wayback set, said it was picturesquely beautiful. In truth their stock of fitting words to express their degree of delight was all too small.

They had many kodak snap-shots of the scenery, in the camera and on the memory, where they had religiously spent the day. Peter Wilkins had asked for a picture of the entire group. Alice asked him what he wanted with it. He answered:

"I simply want it for the satisfaction of a regret when thinking of it. Now, don't think that I think that nothing is good unless it is old, for there you would mistake,—in all things except lovely old women."

All the girls cried "O—ah!"

CHAPTER XXXII

THE letter that came to Mina in due process of time was a beautiful expression of splendid culture, joyful with incident and personal observations about the abundant things to notice, happy with a gentle undertow of sunny spirit, mellow with a sense of the incongruous in surrounding affairs and speech, keen with laughing criticisms of customs and men and measures, and sane in purpose and general tone; and it called her to a reconsideration and introduced her to a better consideration of this happy letter writer. His pen had a liberty in it that was not shown in his hard and fast words in his economic books. The difference was a better revelation of the man and of his mental compass, and, to speak truly, a pleasant surprise. It was a letter that would occupy several printed book-pages, and there was not a limp in the tone of it in a single sentence. He was not one to gossip "shop" in any appreciable degree in his letters, but what he saw and heard and his conclusions about them formed the major part of this epistle,—neither on love, science, art, history, social ethics, political economy, or trade conditions, but on the delightful banter he saw and heard in all things around.

And the compliment of a letter from him, a man of such literary distinction, could not be mistaken. Her own book was an airy, feminine affair, she allowed, and her

next, now almost finished, would not very perceptibly enlarge her limited class of readers, and certainly not bring her very marked popularity, however commercialism might stand behind it and chaperone it into public grace.

It is needless to read his letter. She answered. Her response gave some remark concerning all the friends in this story, and noted that "Clarissa Harlow and Alice Moore-Greenfield spoke very disparagingly of Nero Pensive, the young English Earl." She mentioned that a new character, Dean McBarron, had appeared upon the scene and he was on the side of those "repeating unsavory stories on the poor man." As far as she had been informed Dean McBarron was at odds with the Earl, and she did not know whether it was because of matters long passed or because he had been suborned to play such a part in "the conspiracy." The chief feature of her letter, a thing she had not sufficiently observed, was the story about Nero Pensive. The recipient observed this fact, but with no clear comprehension of what it meant, though he construed it in a general sense to forebode him no good. But his hopefulness never quite forsook him, and hope is the bow of promise of all good in life.

As a matter aside now from his public work, moved by her letter, he began to trace the race of Pensives. It was in the hope he would find everything said of the man false, for he desired the injury of no one, not even a love rival.

At the same time a more extended account of the "rumored engagement of Earl Nero Pensive and Miss Mina Wadsworth" appeared in the morning Washington papers. And the print intimated they might be married in London in the autumn, and that the Earl's family would

have the special pleasure of the presence of King Edward and his Queen Alexandra, and that the King might make the young Earl his equerry. And as his mother was specially chummy with the Queen, and since the King has encouraged this match, or at least known of it, the ceremony would be a handsome affair indeed. It was hinted that Lord Knollys, his majesty's private secretary, would particularly see to the details of the part the King and Queen would take in the wedding ceremony. It had not been officially announced yet when the wedding was to be, but it would be duly announced in good form in good time.

But the ex-Senator remained cautiously discreet in the face of this publication, and the most he would say about it was that it had not leaked into the press columns through him. However, he was absent frequently a month at a time, and his information might be imperfect. He was not prepared to suppose it possible for his daughter, a young lady in whose competency to direct most of her affairs in life he had ultimate faith, to have her *affair de coeur* at such a stage that he could not speak. She was on most truly confidential terms with him, and she never proceeds in an affair vital to her future but she first seeks his advise. He had no hesitancy in believing she would straightway confide such a condition to him.

Mina carried the dispatch in the papers to her mother, and they were more than perplexed about such a glaring fabrication, they were not a little provoked. However, such unbidden vexations were the natural attributes of those who occupied the "seats of the mighty," or dwelt in the places where the public passed by. Mrs. Wadsworth had not a probable suggestion as to the source of

these pure inventions of some "enterprising newspaper man," though she had heard Clarissa Harlow present her reasons for charging the offense upon Nero Pensive. She could see how "romances" could reach the stage of existence independent of "enterprising newspaper men." But most people make the poor newspaper scribblers scapegoats for most of the sins of the multitude.

These two provoked, agitated, worried women proceeded with the matter to "The Cottage," and held long and interested conference there with Clarissa and Alice over this unfounded press report. Alice read it aloud, all listening, as she stood reclining against the end of the piano. All were in morning dress, and A.-M. habits of life, and early-day feeling, and all charged heavily with a sound sense of the strange reality of life. No poetical quotations interlarded the pages of existence in the new part of the day, and all time contained unknown feelings and events and surprises.

"I have a keen sense of the origin of that foolish, false, annoying news," said Clarissa; toying with a hydrangia in the bay-window, and hurling a light from her eyes that smacked of strong, stirring feeling within. Mrs. Wadsworth agitated the rocker she sat in as much as her own self was agitated. But she maintained her equability, for long training of her emotional element had brought her meekly to be submissive to the decrees of charity and cheerfulness (her religion pure and undefiled). She said seriously, gently, sanely:

"I can see that such continued flights of pure invention in this public manner has a common purpose, and

no doubt a common author. But the purpose of it is not so easily comprehended."

"Why should it be Nero Pensive instead of Prof. Nelson?" inquired Alice with more precision than she knew. She sat upon the piano seat, patted her foot nervously upon the velvet carpet, and exposed her lovely neck by looking up to the ceiling, where a gray and blue tint shone down.

"Things once set in motion, by the power of inertia continue to go on until overcome by the power of gravity; and the application of this physical fact is seen in this case. It continues still in motion. Somebody is behind it for a reason." Mina stood up, then sat down in indecision, or maybe in want of centralized self.

"I've no doubt in my mind of its origin, and of its purpose," said Clarissa moving to the front door, then walking back, and reseating herself in the same luxurious chair.

"Who, Sir Oracle?" cried Alice, the tone adding a supplemented commentary upon her brief demand.

"Nero Pensive, to be sure. Who else? And why any one else? Who so interested as he? The purpose is to win consent of Mina, don't you see, by seeming to have her committed to an open avowal of the fact. See?" And again she arose, set her foot squarely upon a figure of the carpet, and estimated how much more foot or shoe was necessary to cover the entire figure.

"I can't see, supposing him for a moment to be the author, what he hopes to gain by such pure figments of the brain," said Mina, as if the question were a hopeless one.

"Yes," and Alice laughed at so simple a proposition.

"All things are fair in love and war," added Clarissa, smiling benignly at Mina, who seemed entirely innocent of an orderly surmise about the matter.

And so they vigorously threshed the case over and over, ever in hopeless uncertainty, getting neither comfort nor definite information out of it. They knew they arrived at nothing more certain than when they began to talk, but then it was such a sweet satisfaction to talk, you know, about so deeply personal affair. And this fact is a philosophical truth and is often an effective relief in extreme mental strain due to great sorrow.

And when Mina and her mother returned home, they questioned themselves as to the extent of the real, live information gained from the conference. No information direct, but some consolation, in truth.

But Clarissa and Alice felt nearer, if possible, than before to these two excellent, kindly hearted women, the like of whom they had never met before.

Did Mina lack force of decision, as to a choice between Prof. Nelson and Nero Pensive? Or was it the mastering, hypnotic force of the evil one baffling her power to choose?

CHAPTER XXXIII

ASHRIEK arose one night from the silent, dark "Cottage." It was long after midnight. The girls, Clarissa and Alice, had been in the non-speculative land of sweet dreams for several hours. The confusion of the city had lulled into silence. The pedestrians' feet forsook the streets and the continuous shuffle of shoe-leather along the pavements was no longer heard. The roar of wheels and the clang of gongs and the thud and jar of street-cars had long ceased, permitting wearied, suffering humanity a bit of sweet peace, such as is not found in the city after Phoebus and the Horae come to rule the day. The fury of business and the race for gold had yielded to the lotus-like influence of Nox, and the bats and the vampires were out and deviltry was uppermost and without organized opposition or check. What deeds of violence and wrong the stars of heaven look down upon! What Eye looks out on men and weeps in sorrow. There is pain in heaven, that pure empyrean of divinity and of all that man holds in reverence and excellence and power, when the world of steady habits and sobriety is housed within protecting walls at home and dreaming of the good of shelter and protection and comfort. And Luna is sometimes shocked at what she beholds, while pursuing her course through the star-lit sky. Ah, how much goes on at night that is never detected! And how much sweet innocence is spared through the love and protecting

arm of Him who established the foundations of the world. The blackness of sin and shame is appalling.

Long had Clarissa and Alice closed the doors, and locked the windows, and turned out the electric lights, and settled into the comforts of luxury and composed sleep, the economy of which in God's plan is not questioned. It seemed restful and trustful even to prepare for the night's sweet repose; it seemed a gracious blessing that golden sleep was vouchsafed to them; it seemed encouraging and uplifting to think of the glorious-promising morrow when things would transpire which no prophet could foretell,—a happy deliverance itself. There was no air of clamor or domestic rioting and anarchy in "The Cottage," when they shut up for the night, drew contentedly within, and felt the sweet comfort of seclusion and exclusion. The manifest peace of "The Cottage" itself was an earnest of the safety of the night and the repose and order of the morrow. They went about their last touches of the day's record, closing the page in quiteness and approved gentleness, with a glad feeling that life was more than "a fleeting show for man's illusion given." The very enveloping darkness over "The Cottage" and the city and the wider world extending all around brought them in closer bond of love for assurance and protection. It is certain that both had remembered their Creator in the days of their youth, though since then he had been absent from their thoughts and hearts,—though not altogether forgotten. It is easy to account for their drifting into the glaring and misleading paths of life. Mrs. Wadsworth and Mina never forgot them and never failed to offer them up daily to the mercy of a throne of grace. Influences, men say, are eternal.

And prayers are a form of influence, to be sure. The last impression of both girls was that they were glad they were alive.

"I hear a noise in the room," said Clarissa, startled from gentle sleep about two o'clock in the morning. She was alarmed. She sat up erect in bed, but could not penetrate the darkness around.

"No," said Alice, starting up in fright from a dreamless slumber.

"There it—;" but Clarissa did not finish her sentence.

Alice, painfully aroused now, heard a slight scuffle. Terrified as never before, she screamed one loud, piercing, appealing scream that even echoed down the street. Some neighbors heard one keen, piquant, frightened, mad shriek somewhere in the locality, and wondered, arousing themselves in homes enough to speak of it and listen for its repetition. Of course it meant something; all midnight feminine screams of desperation do.

"None of that, meleddy," said a savage, beastly voice close in her ear. The intense darkness itself was appalling, but the grim, harsh, male voice, at such a moment and under such conditions, fairly palsied her. Before she could again utter an alarming, piercing scream, a fierce, rough hand clasped her throat and bore her back upon the bed. Both breath and voice were suddenly cut off, and she, strange as it may seem, wondered where they would plunge the deadly blade into her sacred body and make a lesion through which her sweet young life should steal. She had no other thought than this. She struggled and fought, but in vain. Her arms were pinioned, her mouth filled with some dirty rag, and she was

in a position to resist no more—passive. It was evident the purpose was not murder; perhaps robbery.

“Now will you be good,” said the gruff, coarse, human devil. She had no choice but to consent to this request.

Clarissa had been bound and gagged, but she resisted with so much purpose that in the struggle she fell upon the floor, where she was held with more ease by the hands and knees of the sovereign rascal. And she too was subdued.

Then she wondered what had befallen Alice. Was she indeed murdered! The torture, in the fear that possessed her, was intensified by her inability to make inquiry or convey her emotions to another. Alone! Not a comforting friendly voice, not a sound, except the smothered voices of the ghouls,—a state that rendered the situation appalling. It explained nothing to roll over the floor; it brought no information to wish; it was impossible to guess the men or their purpose. She was thankful they had not come to desecrate the temple of womanly sanctity. Perhaps they were merely robbers with no design on life or person. It is indeed desperation of the most miserable form to be forced to lie in the dark upon the floor, bound and gagged, and await the pleasure of villains standing over,—await their next move. She heard a faint, smothered groan, so it seemed, from Alice, who lay helpless upon the bed. And the feeble sound had its side of cheer, notwithstanding the horror it also conveyed. Alice was alive then. But what had they done to her! Then Clarissa groaned. It was feeble, but it was a masonic communication to Alice. It of course spoke much to Alice. Joy in groans,—proof that everything is relative.

One of the scoundrels now passed through to the rear of "The Cottage," opened the back door, and looking out gave one quick, sharp whistle. It was a concerted communication to others.

In a brief moment two men in mask entered, and stole silently through the inner darkness to the sleeping-room where Clarissa and Alice were. The contest was unequal, devilish, the method of assassins,—of the Thugs of India. Of course they were cowards and sneaks and all the other epithets that men have invented for such masked pariahs, devils, or what not. Such a base, ignoble assault upon two defenceless, harmless, innocent, helpless women of course had its meaning. There is retribution, perhaps necessary because of training not always equal and exact, in the human conscience, thank God, if there is not justice always in the regulations of men.

There were now four men in the room, and two women, tied, defenceless, helpless. Be ye men, and suffer not the shame of this dishonorable deed! Be ye men, and seek not rather to protect the gentler, feebler sex! Be ye men, guilty of this fiendish act, and ask for feminine love and helpfulness! Be ye men, and ask not that protection be extended to your mothers and sisters and sweethearts. Be ye men, and look not for heaven to frown down upon such deeds of cowardly infamy. Be ye men, and claim the respect of law and of the public, after such crimes against every sense of human right and fairness! O, that law could reach into the secret places and protect the innocent and prevent the wrong! Like the poor we have the criminal with us always, and will as long as human nature and human conditions remain

unchanged and unregenerate. And no one can undo and recreate according to his own ideas of things the works of God or of the devil. Certainly not by altering environment or government. Is there no release in this mundane sphere from selfishness! Must every one carry out his selfish purposes to gratify self in the end! Is selfishness the keystone of the universe! And is it supreme, and will it always prevail to the injury of others! Is another's necessity nothing, and may it be crushed with impunity for king self!

Self is the counterpart of the law of service and love, and will always exist, since love would be valueless without it. Self harms others for self; love helps others for their own sake.

One of the two men last to enter "The Cottage" flashed a bulls'-eye over the scene, and both girls saw that their assailants were masked. Clarissa's eyes caught the flash of a diamond ring on the hand of one, and it occurred to her she had seen it before. But of this she could not be positive. Had she been able, she would have known. This fact of the ring rendered the situation more intricate and dark. The first to assault them now stood aside for the other two. No one spoke, perhaps lest his voice disclose him. And every movement was with cautious feet. The moment was extreme, and intense with more than fear and anxiety. The moments were prodigious with birth of hate and anger. In the light of the bull's-eye the scene seemed outre and fiendish. One man in mask said in tones meant to be not his own:

"In haste!"

"No!"

The language was incomprehensible to the two unhappy girls. Both heard words with the intensest attention and keenest mental activity. They presaged another move. That there was no more verbal intercourse signified fear of detection. Hence both girls reached the same conclusion; namely, that they knew the men, though disguise concealed their names or identity. Therefore these fellows had a design not yet apparent. It appeared not to be robbery. It might be kidnapping.

The man with the diamond ring strode up to Clarissa, and in threatening manner flashed a genuine brand of the Bowie knife over her. It was a pantomime performance, meant but to intimidate into silence now and henceforth. The cowardly act had not a shadow of terror in it for her. He gave way for the other mask, who held the bull's-eye direct in her face, held a ghastly glittering knife poised over her, and savagely and meanly growled in disguised tones:

"Never again mention the Earl's name to Miss Wadsworth. Take notice. Be warned in time. This is but a showing of what will truly happen next time." This fellow's mask was as hideous as a face of one tortured in Hades a day. The fellow with the diamond ring approached Alice and in altered voice said:

"Both of you leave this city at once, on peril of your life. Let not to-morrow night find you here. Hear—heed; or take the consequences. This is not buncomb, not mere make-believe; not to scare, but to warn."

Then he stooped over, put both hands upon her, and shook her with satanic vigor and meanness. She did not fear, after having heard what was said to Clarissa, and

she raged to speak and taunt the villain about his "galvanic chivalry" and his "courtly civility" toward two weak, helpless, defenceless American women, whom most gallant men genuinely desire to protect, not to harm. She entertained the thought that the crudest barbarian in the world would not be guilty of what these supposedly Christianized heathens were doing.

The meaning of all this now had cropped out. This unfounded act was to terrorize them into a closed and sealed mouth concerning Nero Pensive, to compel secrecy, to prevent any further revelations about him to Miss Mina Wadsworth. And who but one desired absolute silence, or need take steps to enforce it? A safe preventive was separation from Mina, and separation could be best brought about by drastic measures. Nero must be allowed to proceed in peace with his shady wooing. That a step like this should be made demonstrated the crisis in his financial affairs. Money was his great desideratum. But was he one of the four dark rascals in this wonderful (!) assault upon two harmless, helpless ladies! If not, then did he organize the attack and direct from afar!

These were what might be called circumstantial conclusions. Such villainies often end in tragedy. Sometimes circumstantial evidence develops shameful and long-drawn blunders. The mistakes of courts form a sorrowful chapter in the annals of the human family. If Nero did not direct this deed of criminality, then was the whole affair as mysterious as spiritualism or the mysticism of a philosophy that is not meant to be comprehended.

Clarissa, it may be openly confessed because there is no need to conceal the fact, had had some little acquaintance

with the unapproved side of life, and she was very apt in conjecturing from results to causes, according to the inductive method, being somewhat conversant with shady proceedings and therefore better able to draw conclusions than others not so trained. And she fastened it all upon Nero. Naturally she could think of no other one.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A CHAIN of policemen was around "The Cottage." Dean McBarron, who had suspected some foul intent ever since he fell upon Mith Gulliver the first night Clarissa and Alice had domiciled themselves in "The Cottage," saw to it then that a guard of protection was ever near.

When Alice raised the one shriek of alarm, the watchman heard. He notified Dean. A noiseless guard was drawn around the house, as silently as snow falls, as lightly as ghosts walk in haunted places. They heard some slight sounds within, where darkness prevailed. Silence succeeding one alarmed and alarming shriek does not argue consent to the stillness that might follow. Something was happening that was criminal, no doubt.

Dean was not mistaken, and hesitancy did not mark his efforts at relief. The unwritten law would sustain him whatever he did.

He and a captain of the police stole through the rear door, as gently as breath, and tiptoed through the thick blackness of the rooms to the scene of the villains, but with cautious ear. A subdued male voice in a room to the right stirred Dean's blood. The door was closed. By chance a peep through the keyhole disclosed the situation by a lucky flash within of the bull's eye. The condition had not altered any there. The furies of the past tore

through Dean's heart. There was an emergency. Dean stood up after a peep through the keyhole, and with a quick surge he flung the door wide open. The bull's-eye had closed as by magic, and not a gleam pointed them how to proceed.

Poor, helpless girls, they could not make an outcry, could not shout at their rescue, could not welcome their deliverer.

The captain stepped in hurriedly after Dean and closed the door.

"Trapped, men," said the captain. "A line of policemen surround you. Surrender."

He was answered by a revolver. Words could not be fitly spoken now. The flash revealed the spot of the villain, but he was not stupid and instantly shifted his position. Just as the captain flashed a bull's-eye upon the tragic scene, Dean fired. There was another shot, and the hand that held the light let go. The lamp fell with a thump and went out. Dean fired again, and the captain fired. It was a duel in the dark at close range, suggestive of Jules Verne's duel scene in *Michael Strogoff*. One villain yelled:

"Furies!"

His pistol fell with a thud. The noise was welcome to the rescuers. The cry of pain was a victory. Many more shots now followed like a fusillade. Dean rushed forward and grappled one of the men, much as men of war did in the old-time sea fights. As he did so, some one struck a match. The one whom Dean had caught accidentally dropped his mask in the struggle. In the light of the match, ignited by one of the villains, the man Dean had

grasped put his revolver at Dean's throat and fired, the ball passing through the victim's neck. Dean's hands relaxed and he sank to the floor. The fellow, who had a diamond ring as the captain saw, turned, reached the window, and with a plunge fell through the glass upon the outside on the soft grass. While a dozen policemen were rushing into the room to the assistance of Dean and the captain, the man who crashed through the window slunk away behind the shrubbery, hurried along the fence shadow half bent, and was seen no more.

The other three men were soon overpowered and captured, and marched off at once to the lock-up, where they underwent some of the restraints they were enforcing upon others.

The captain and one of his men released the bound and gagged young women, and light was at once turned on, and Dean was looked after and cared for in the best of manner.

Nothing can paint the attitude of mind and feelings of the two girls. They had been silent, helpless, enforced spectators of a battle at near range, one of the deadliest kind and one that requires the greatest courage. They were not themselves free from danger, and a stray shot might end their careers. However horrible had been their situation before the fight, it became during the battle ten fold more agonizing. No one can tell the torture of the sensations of those passing through a desperate tragedy and altogether helpless, either to flee for safety or to assist their friends.

Few words had been said upon the circumscribed battle-ground in that bed-room. After the contest the feel-

ing was so distressed and shocked that words lost force and even meaning. This was an experience so rare that no language has been invented to depict either emotions or scene.

Perhaps Dean was murdered outright by the villains. After her release and by the aid of the light, Clarissa recognized him, and ran and lifted his ghastly bloody head. He was her friend,—her friend in her greatest trial in life, and now was dying in her defense,—laid down his life for her! His blood,—shocking!—awful!—past the boundaries of reason!—streamed over her kimono. Soon she was bloodier than he was, but still she clung to him as if she would retain his life by holding him.

“O, Dean! and all this for me!” She stroked back the hair that had scattered over his great brow. His eyes were closed. He was breathing, but he seemed unconscious. “Dean! Open those speculative eyes and let me see that you are still there. Dean! O I will not let you die this way. Dean! Hear me; it is so painful and so constricts the heart to speak and not know you are heard. Dean! Is my voice no longer a thing of beauty and a joy forever to you. O, will you now steal away before our eyes and leave us alone, after dying to save *us*,—for whom! Dean! Will I never more see the smile on your lips and the summery laugh in your eyes and hear the sweet joy of love from your tongue. Dean—Dean—O! Heaven, hear me, if he will not and tell me, and tell me, O tell me. I know not what I should be told; you do. And Dean! I love you, and I do not know why, and I can’t—I can’t let you leave me. The

variations of life,—no dream can equal them, no fancy can paint them, no youth can conceive of them! Dean! I must not let you leave me here alone in this unfriendly, bleak world. There is a way out, the one Brutus found at Phillippi, and I can go to you, follow you, let the world slip into its dotage, pass it up, and cross over to you. Dean! You can't mean to be cruel and forsake me forever, deny me, and go down into the gloomy cold pit alone. You have been a friend to me—a friend—a friend such as circumstances can't make or unmake,—a friend such as fate gives to few. Dean! hear me, Dean! I have never denied you; I have taken you as the measure of everything straight and worth while in life. Dean! Look up, speak, let me hear you say my name once more, and know that you have not wiped me out of your heart and denied my portrait on the walls of the galleries of your memory!"

Poor, weeping, sad thing! Alice went to her, tried to lead her away, to enlist her in other things, counseled her.

"Come away, my dear, and let others care for Dean," Alice insisted.

"No—no! let me be! He would want me here, and would not be happy if he knew I were not here!"

The physician came, for whom the captain had telephoned. Clarissa gave way to him. The surgeon made a hasty examination, ordered an ambulance, and sent him immediately to one of the hospitals. The captain's wound was in the palm of the hand, not very serious or painful, and he never retired from duty on account of it.

In less than one hour "The Cottage" was still, echoless, peaceful; but stained profusely with blood upon one of

the carpets. It henceforward had a tragic history, and people would point to it and recite perverted portions of the story related here. Always thenceon it was to be uncanny.

The two young ladies, dressed afresh and anew, were conducted with profound circumspection by the police captain to the home of ex-Senator Wadsworth, where they were admitted about three o'clock in the morning.

Every nerve was tense, sleep was far away, the pulse still ran strong in excitement, the memory was shocking them with the awful views registered there, the tongue felt palsied and stiff after the rough gagging it had endured, and they were objects of real concern and pity.

And when they had told their story to Mrs. Wadsworth and Mina, broken, and patched, and amended, and full of emotional color, the agitated auditors declared it surpassed the greatest fancies of fiction, the wildest inventions of novelists. They said no stone should be left unturned, until the criminals were found and handled to the fullest extent of the law. Both Mina and her mother felt like reprobating themselves for allowing the girls to domiciliate themselves alone in "The Cottage."

The ex-Senator learned the story from the columns of the paper next morning, knowing nothing more than that. He was nonplussed to find a motive for the dark deed. The story itself was a revelation in a free country and startled him,—there in the heart of his own city and almost in his own home. It could not be overlooked. It must be "run down." The agents must be found.

In London Prof. P. Thomas Nelson took up his morning paper, while waiting the pleasure of an untipped

waiter for his breakfast, and read the brief account with alarmed interest. It seemed impossible that any persons he ever knew should be the actors in such a tragic drama. Had he known the later developments of this social *lèse majesté* of the villains, he would have been less puzzled to understand. The press notice was too meager in statement to convey anything clear to him. There was little more in the brief cable news than that such a piece of diabolism had been perpetrated in the very capital of the United States and almost in the very home of one of the United States ex-Senators.

The Professor dispatched his meal with hasty concern, and then wrote and dispatched a brief cablegram to Mina, expressing joy at her safety and surprise at the emotion-exciting crime and asking details of the affair. Then he resumed his daily inquiries, and took up the labor of collecting facts and statistics at first-hand and counseling and elaborating with the two other members of the committee. The second morning he read a fuller account.

The public, generally apathetic to such things because of the daily deluge of them, regarded this affair, because of the prominence of the personages in it, with more attention than ordinary. And especially was this true in Washington. The wide circle of acquaintances of the Wadsworths, and their social leadership in that city, and their very great wealth, afforded the press reasons for entering into fuller details the second morning. There was an extended, full, and detailed report. In addition there was a deluge of talk, small and otherwise, and

speculations and guesses were as profuse as fallen autumn leaves shifting in the wind.

Early in the day, moved by the *one* event of the night preceding, Peter Wilkins, in faultless dress (neatness of person was Peter's one and only weakness), and Clever Hesperus, not a dude, but one who was as exact in dress as in speech and manner, called at the Wadsworth home to offer sympathy and obtain the truth. The desperate deed seemed almost personal, since it affected those they knew so well and so recently held intimate converse with.

Peter Wilkins was never nervous, and Clever Hesperus, if ever nervous was too well self-disciplined to permit a sign of it to manifest itself, and they entered into the merits of the story *con amore* as Clarissa Harlow and Alice Moore-Greenfield related it in feminine, emotional, repetitious manner.

"I would say, if I were called upon to express an opinion, that the villains met with less in the rencontre than they evidently merited," said precise Clever Hesperus, when the story had been told and reached the stage of addenda and ample notes.

"The motive for it all passes my understanding, turn the case as I may," said Mina in an unconscious judicial tone. She had just crossed the luxuriously carpeted and richly furnished drawing-room and had sat down by Peter Wilkins, the act being entirely without purpose or self-consciousness. The intensity of the moment had moved all to a disregard of that aplomb and self-restraint which more stately occasions impose. Peter, at the moment unconscious of his act, walked to the opposite side of the room and sat in a chair that had occupied his eye for

some time, and had mesmerically drawn him to it. No one observed his movement, though subsequently it was spoken of by Peter himself.

"There is a reason for this assault, and there is a person with a reason sufficient, as he evidently thought, I venture to think, to do this thing," said Clever Hesperus, with a sort of Henry James tone of analysis.

"That is clear, at all events," said Clarissa, "and I know him from a diamond ring that flashed on his finger in the very deepest of his deed. It was a gift of mine, in my palmy days, before I had been robbed and deserted by him." She looked at Mina. Alice also turned her lustrous black eyes like a lorgnette upon her.

"I'm sorry to hear this. If true, and I can't doubt it, the Earl is a man we should be glad to be relieved of," said Mrs. Wadsworth. Mina did not speak, though she was expected openly to coincide with her mother.

"An examination of the prisoners may bring forth some real live evidence, something that may send the luxury of shivers upon us," said Peter Wilkins, giving an exhibition of the sort of shivers he meant.

"And I knew him when his mask fell off," said Alice.

"Pity he got away," said Clarissa in deep seriousness.

"There's a limit to the earth these modern times, and so as long as a man is above ground he may be found," remarked Peter Wilkins, lifting his eyes to the ceiling, as if defying any culprit to escape the argus-eyed "bloody" law in these wide-awake latter days.

"I wonder, if indeed I may wonder at all at anything and at any time, who the fellows were the police captured," said the exact Clever Hesperus.

"I have not heard," said Clarissa.

"They may peach," said Peter in fervent notes. "Finding themselves pinched by the red-eyed law, they may be like the little boy, who had his older brother also feel his papa's 'soft tooth' so as not to be the only victim of the laughable jest. That is the spirit of human nature."

"The gravity of the case is that one man should be killed," said Mrs. Wadsworth.

"How far they have carried on their lower-world desperation may not now be known, for I'm convinced the police and Dean McBarron interrupted the proceedings." Clarissa shuddered as she permitted her imagination to conjecture what might, and perhaps would, have happened. "Poor Dean—poor Dean! He gave his valuable sweet life for me! And I'm not worthy of the sacrifice!"

She stole out of the room in a gush of tears, and every one had a real ache in the heart for her. Mrs. Wadsworth could not conceal a sympathetic tear that rimmed her lids.

"I may say," said the impossible man who couldn't make a mistake, "that Miss Harlow is still wrought up in thought and feeling, and realizes more and more, as she comes back to her normal self, that a man of some kind lost his precious life in her defense."

There was more conversation, all tending to the further elucidation of this unhappy affair, and perhaps an hour was consumed thus. As soon as the two male visitors had gone, Clarissa, Alice and Mrs. Wadsworth went to the hospital to see the dying man. But they were not allowed to see him. However, he was living still. The expert surgeon, one of the best in the country, said the man's life was in the balance with nine chances in ten against him.

"Mrs. Wadsworth," said the man of probe and scalpel,

after having exhausted his non-English terms to describe the serious wound that almost always proves mortal, "I would I could give you as definite hope as I have given you definite description of the case, but unfortunately I can not."

"I'm indeed sorry the case is hopeless," said Mrs. Wadsworth dejectedly.

She led away the girls, silently, for they were bathed in smothered tears. A great grief, the Popocatapetl of her sorrows, had entered the soul of Clarissa like iron. There was a time when sorrows were so exotic and far away, that she never dreamed they could ever come near enough to dwell in her soul. She thought, if she thought at all, that she and sorrow would forever remain total strangers,—never meet, in fact, and be introduced,—strangers! And if sorrow ever came to ask acquaintance she would cut the sombre dame dead. But now—why this idea seemed so childish and immature—"crude and amateurish," she afterward allowed.

They recounted to Mina their experiences at the hospital, and the hopelessness of the life of poor Deane McBaron. Clarissa could not think or speak of it without the wells of sympathy washing lines upon her sorrow-shaken face. Consolation, there was none for her. Loving words, they were stupid. The law and the culprits, this was mockery.

Alice seemed enthusiastic in the hope that the four desperadoes might fall into the pit they had dug. The nervous tension of all was extreme, and the more talk the more thought and distress there was. Clarissa was almost in a state of collapse. Alice was in the attitude of mind that caused enlarged, excited, quick-flashing eyes.

It was the day of days to them, and the recent alarming events kept the feelings active, excited, exhausting. There was no ray that could dispel the shadow, no arm that could reach down through the clouds and support, no voice that could approach the soul with a soothing, quieting message. Sorry to say it, but these two girls had neglected to cultivate intimate acquaintance with God since their spiritual tutelage at early home. And now, God being a comparative stranger, their soul-cries in secret to him for comfort were of little avail. Their own minds, so long neglected, had not been accustomed to receive consolation from Him, the author of life and love and light, and they were ignorant of the methods to obtain His loving cheer. But Mrs. Wadsworth did not forget them, when she spoke heavenwards of evenings. Her soothing, balmy, loving, matronly hand and influence supplied the place of mother to these poor world-drifting creatures. Because she was a new-found mother, she was dearer to them than the mothers who went from them; dearer if possible than she was to Mina, for Mina had never known the need of one by the want of one.

Mrs. Wadsworth, by kindly ways, without insistence or logical appeals, turned their feet into the paths of peace, and set them journeying on the way that Pilgrim went. Music seemed now sweeter and brighter to Clarissa than ever before. Alice determined that her vast fortune should not be squandered by a foolish girl. Mrs. Wadsworth assured the two adopted daughters, so in a sense, that crosses are ladders that reach to heaven, according to the French proverb, and that trials are great disciplinary activities.

These two bits of human driftwood were not brought to wisdom's ways in an hour, or a day, or a month.

CHAPTER XXXV

NERVING herself for the purpose, Clarissa decided to visit the lock-up that same afternoon. Mina and Alice and Peter Wilkins and Clever Hesperus would accompany her. Such a visit, for such a purpose as they entertained, possessed marvelous possibilities in it. Clarissa hoped to gain, if possible, some bit of sustaining information in the case. It might make clear the motive for the assault, and resolve all her doubts.

No, the prisoners could not be brought out of the detention room; however, they could be seen from the corridor and talked to, if that would be satisfactory. It was forbidden to give a prisoner a chance to escape.

Mina grieved under the yoke of self-reproach, and felt a shock, on entering this slum-element depository,—where vile criminals and the scum of humanity are held in durance vile for breaking the law as defined by Blackstone and his followers. It was no credit for any one, official or criminal, to be there for any purpose. And so she issued formal indictment and impeached herself for being there,—though she was justified according to legal terms. She went under protest, though in obedience to the subpoena of true friendship. It is certain she thought of “The Inferno” and the Mantuan guide of the Florentine poet.

What was Clarissa’s and Alice’s surprise to find one of the prisoners none other than Mith Gulliver. He had

given his name to the police records as St. Townsen. The other two men were strangers. They were low-browed, paid accomplices. They were as guilty as they looked mean.

Mith had a slight wound in the wrist, the result of a bullet in the *melée* the night before, but he treated it as nothing.

"This bit of a scratch is nothing, I can tell you. I say it's nothing," he continued in his garrulous strain, "to what I have had when pursuing the line of my regular duty as detective [a barefaced untruth], and I never was afraid of any weapon man ever stuck in the face of another." He in truth was less brave than his statement made him appear, he never was shot at before, and he never was wounded by a leaden missile till now. He was proud of his wound. The oftener he would tell it the greater it would become in the future, like a snow-ball rolled in the snow.

"If I may speak a sentiment I find lying very close to my heart,—nearer than to my intellect,—I must say I am surprised and aggrieved to find you here," said the strictly correct Clever Hesperus. Peter Wilkins was standing near Mina in both an assuring and a protecting attitude, and he spoke before Mith could resume:

"It is unaccountable that you should be here, Mr. Gulliver."

"No. I say no. I said no, you heard me. You don't know me. You don't know me yet."

"True!" assented Clarissa. Her detective! And here! For assaulting her he was paid to defend! Could she believe her eyes and ears! How she had been imposed upon!

And he had taken her money to betray her! And betray her to her deadliest, vilest enemy—her husband!

“But I’m here,” resumed Mith; “and I was trapped in your room,—you two. So much you knew before I told you, I say. But you don’t know the rest. Clarissa will not believe, I guess, when I tell her, and I call God to strike me dead if it is not true in every item and particular,—tell her that I was never her detective in truth, but Nero Pensive’s. But I took her money, pretending to spy on him, when I was merely carrying reports of her to him.”

“O you miserable—worst ever!” Clarissa cried in tones of regret at the deception he had put upon her. She was too over-taxed in astonishment to respond to him in terms that would do justice to the villain.

“Was ever such a dastard unhung,” cried Alice, a flush of anger scurrying over her lovely, loving face like a dense storm-cloud over the sky.

“O, that small little bit of deception was scarcely big enough to make a mark on my seared conscience. Another thing, one I did at Atlantic City, by order of him who all along had paid me good big money, so that I had no kick coming, and that thing was the attempted robbery of the Wadsworth cottage. I didn’t get away with the jewelry case after I had it in my possession. Miss Wadsworth there knows very well why. She and a nasty big dog had something to do with it. She knows. She knows all about it, I say. But I played a slick game, and never went away from there, and so all clue to me was lost. I called next day to see you, Miss Wadsworth, to show myself how easy and slick it could be done. I took my report of

the failure to secure the diamonds to Nero Pensive in New York, and he was out of funds and out of temper, and we had a real time of it, now you can bet, a real 'hot time in old town to-night.' But he couldn't afford to break with me. So we made up again over a bottle of old Madeira and brandy and soda. He had been down to Atlantic City just before, incog., you know, and he planned this robbery and put me to do the biz., while he returned to New York for safety."

"Are you romancing?" demanded Peter sternly, centering his eyes with penetrating force upon the wordy fellow.

"True as Gospel preaching, true as I'm living, true as I'm here," said Mith, brows knit to enforce his words and make doubly sure that he uttered the truth.

"It seems incredible," said Mina, looking at Peter. A monstrous plot was being unfolded, an incredible affair.

"Indeed, my friends, I say, he was mighty low in funds then, and he had to raise the wind, you know, and couldn't wait to marry Miss Wadsworth, and so the diamond robbery he planned and was carried to a successful failure. He married Miss Alice—lem me see,—Alice Moore-Greenfield here in double quick order along just before then, and that scheme to gobble up her money under another name also went wrong. Ever since he had been in this country, things have looked awfully blue for him." The narrator beat the iron grating with closed hand, in taps not altogether gentle, indicative of the feeling within. "The nasty thing we were in last night," he resumed, "and that ended in tripping me up and trapping me into this calaboose is of course in everybody's mouth. Nero

Pensive was again the headpiece to this fine failure. He planned it. It was a scheme of his own invention. He thought it out in detail, I say, and then confided it to me,—the whole thing, you know. I got the two fellows here now with me in this lovely place, as you see, to do the first part of the work. If the girls should give the alarm, the fellows could slope, and we two wouldn't be known in it, see! After they had successfully gagged the two girls, we, Nero and me, went in, safe then, you see. It was all planned and done to keep the two girls from telling on him to the Wadsworths, with whom he wished then to stand in. He wanted to shut off Alice's story about marrying Ron Cornwallis, and he meant to scare her into silence, and drive 'em both out of town. And Clarissa mustn't tell any more that she is his wife. Not much. And he don't believe it yet. But he said he recollected afterward that you, Miss Harlow, or Mrs. Pensive, acted mighty queer on the marriage morn'. But—be it as it may, he must now do the next best thing and smother out, somehow or other, I say, all gossip, until after he was safely married to Miss Wadsworth, at least of all events, and got his hand deeply into her fat purse. It was the fat purse he was after, and he had to get that through the girl, with the girl thrown in as cumbrous baggage. After he shot Dean McBarron last night he sloped, and I think a smashed window in 'The Cottage' will prove this fact. You, I think, will never find him. The marriage of Miss Wadsworth is all off suddenly now. Circumstances have changed, you know. He paid reporters liberally to put the account of his engagement to Miss Wadsworth in the papers, for the purpose, he said, of making her think an

engagement to an English Earl was worth while. But the notice will never again be inspired by him. It was mighty good in the girls to move alone into 'The Cottage,' just to his hand, he said, seemed like providence in his favor, and he actually laughed instead of swearing as he usually done. Now, I've told you the whole truth, if I never told it before, and nothing but the truth, so help me Jonathan, and I will swear it before any court on earth or in heaven,—before my God I will."

The fellow seemed sincere. The other two fellows were mute, faces averted, but all ears to the story.

"What you have said of last night's deviltry is true, I know," said Clarissa.

"And I know it to be true, too," said Alice. "But I never knew before why he married me on a caprice."

"All these things, I doubt not, permit me to say *en peasant*, are susceptible of proof, or if not *susceptible* then *capable* of proof," said the wily, over-straight Clever Hesperus.

"Proofs will not be wanting at the proper time," said Peter Wilkins with more assurance than usual.

"If I may be so bold, and you will pardon me I am already assured, who is this Nero Pensive, said to be an English Earl, I should cleverly like to know," asked Clever Hesperus, a deeper line in his brow than common, and a new application of mind shown in his eyes. He went up as near Mith Gulliver as the iron grating would permit. Even Peter Wilkins was called upon to remark the evidence of self-assertiveness manifested for the first time in the case by the questioner. Hitherto he had allowed them to regard him as a good, easy, clever, exact, eccen-

tric fellow, with less energy than is required to turn the world over; but his true, direct, core-center question argued much in his favor.

"I know little about his antecedents," said Mith Gulliver, a frown ominous setting serenely upon his cheeks, more significant of his state of feelings than suggestive of clear-working intelligence, "and I wish I knew less." He inspected casually his bandaged hand. "I know him to be an Englishman, son of a man of title, and that he has an elder brother, Lord Elmdale, in Parliament. I met him in Paris, where I was looking up a case, and he there engaged me in his services,—more than a year ago. He threw money away lavishly, as a man who might dwell on Money avenue. He said he needed me, and he called me a 'nosey fellow,' a sort of 'butinsky,' he said, just his style and need. I was simply to do as he said, be his tool, play Foxy Grandpa, Buster Brown, Sherlock Holmes, or even Raffles or Checkers or the Yellow Kid, if need be. And I did, and he gave me money. He never told me half he had in mind, or the reasons why he often sent me to privily capture other people's sentiments and plans. I was even at times sent to prey upon the sentiment and feelings, seize them and carry them to him, of Miss Wadsworth. I suppose he knew what he was doing, I didn't always."

"Where did he haunt, not frequent, most in this country, I ask you point direct, sir," said Clever Hesperus.

"New York was the radiating point, easiest to conceal in or fly from; you know."

"Did he suppose your attack upon 'The Cottage' would

end disastrously?" asked Clever Hesperus like an attorney.

"No—he had no idea of such a possibility, and thought he had cut off every possibility of defeat or detection by employing two men to go first and prepare the way, you see."

"Two Johns in the Wilderness instead of one," remarked Peter Wilkins as an aside matter.

"Did he ever say where he would go should he suddenly leave the United States?" asked Clever Hesperus direct.

"No—well—no! Of course he would go back home to England, or some other place."

"No doubt," interposed Peter Wilkins. Mina smiled for the first, after this unholy place had dragged forward all the disorderly emotions of her heart.

"I've no use for him now. He's deserted me in the very hour and article of my extreme distress, when he should be at my elbow standing up for me who's done so much for him."

"To be sure he should. But he isn't, you see," said Peter blandly, touchingly, mockingly. "Whenever I see a man speaking tenderly and like a professional tear-crier of his quondam friend, saying he has no more use for him, I understand he has lost out with him. Evidently."

"Well, wouldn't you?" Mith hurled back.

"Where human nature reigns supreme, the one we once loved but now hate will ever get the blister end of our tongues. One, however, *can* get familiar with the devil and perhaps in time find even some good in him, and even some evil," said Peter sardonically. Mina again smiled, and Alice chuckled.

They departed. But not till Peter Wilkins had requested that the prisoners be detained till he could properly proceed against them.

This man, Peter, one of the very best young legal talents in the city of Washington, at once offered his services to Clarissa and Alice, not as one guilty of champerty but as a friend, and not a friend either as by proxy through Mina, his ideal, who had been unfortunate in exciting a love that she could not return. His legal services were accepted with joyful alacrity. And Clever Hesperus, as a very excellent second, offered to aid Mr. Wilkins to prosecute the case to the legal limit.

So it was concluded.

The poor victims of the chief conspirator, who must suffer as accomplices in the deed, were not generally reprobated so much nor allowed to be so guilty as he who engaged them. It was on this theory that the two attorneys proceeded.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE confession of Mith Gulliver, and the employment of attorneys to investigate the matter before a court of justice, left no room for Mina longer to question the duplicity of Earl Nero Pensive. And in a brief time the very name began to look ugly to her. The spell of his telepathic charm was dissolved. She came to this conclusion from evidence that induced a revulsion toward him, who endeavored to compromise her innocence into a guilty union with him, knowing at the same time his utter unworthiness for such an alliance. The deeper the psychological crime of the arch conspirator sought to commit sank into her consciousness, the more unworthy and desperate he became. He cared not for her honor, her family name, her happiness, or her future in any sense. He was despicably selfish in his low purpose. It was not herself he sought as any honorable man would have done, but her vast inheritance. To be sure the annual allowance by her father during his lifetime would not be niggardly, and after her parents' death untold wealth would be theirs. Her thoughts brought a revolution of sentiment against all foreign titles in general, remembering what her father had said to her in Paris about the poor, trashy, titled gentry.

"How *could* he do it, my dear!" cried Mina to her mother in sheer terror as she contemplated the revolting fact in all its ramifications.

"Be glad, my dear, you escaped so grave a calamity," said the mother kindly. They were walking down Pennsylvania avenue on a little shopping jaunt. "A mistake of such a character so spoils life here that it pursues them, I half think, into eternity, and establishes, or naturalizes, them down there in a new country, differently governed from our great land, narrowed in nature very much as they were when they departed from the shores of time. Be thankful, my dear, you are Scot free."

"O, mamma! I shudder when I think of it, think of the social precipice on the very brink of which I stood toppling. It meant my absolute and everlasting ruin."

"A miss is as good as a mile."

"I detest and abominate such a consummate hypocrite. What professions he made to me, what lies he told, and what lies he meant me to infer,—worse even than the spoken lies."

"There are all grades and shades and shapes and sizes and types of mortality and morality, from the eye-uplifted style to the style that blends with the socially indiscreet. And with all our best care and attention to distinguish the pure from the adulterated, we all of us are sometimes imposed on and deceived."

"Is it true, that he never had honest intentions in all the nice fanciful things he devised and said to me! I'm pained to find human honor possible of such real decay. He then meant nothing in what he said to me. False—false, every word of it. Uttered for a criminal purpose. It is my ideal to place my love upon one so I can say, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.' I thank the fates and poor, suffering Clarissa and sweet Alice for this timely ex-

posure. How much I owe them! I'm happy in knowing the Christian duty not to forsake them. But I must confess to you, mamma, and it would not alter the fact if I said it in a spirit of sour grapes, I confess that I never really thought seriously a moment of the man. It horrifies me to think I was the victim of an attempted deception. Riches have dangers, great dangers. I don't know what the public will think now after all those foolish, foolish, foolish statements in the press. But, indeed, instinct revolted against the man, and a secret feeling, a sort of subliminal sense, caused me to be on my guard against him in his presence; and I even had to restrain myself from open antagonism. Now I hope I will not be understood as playing or toying or flirting with him by allowing his palaverous attentions."

"I have heard you make remarks to him that had a jar in them," said Mrs. Wadsworth.

"As I have before told you, mamma, he proposed and insisted upon it more than once, but I put him off with dubious remarks. It never had an air of great seriousness in it.

"The man was not a man."

"The title never appealed to me and is no sort of substitute for a real man," said Mina. "I never found him soul-congenial. His telephatic touch was repellant. In externals he was perfect,—speech and social ceremony. I really feel relieved now. I was required by courtesy to entertain him, but, to be sure, not to entertain his matrimonial advances. I never felt that a union with him (notice I use individual pronouns) would bring me into the matrimonial Beulah land. He forced himself on me."

"I think love matches, coupled with good sound sense, can't be very far from the God design in the beginning with our Edenic parents."

"It is never diplomatic, I think, for a girl to *say* it must be this one or none, whatever she may *think*, so long as she is denied seeking for her 'soul-mate' but must await a selection by him. One sided. This is why girls make themselves fashion-attractive and clothes-peacockish, so as to win notice and choice. It's all they can do." Mina thought this.

"I see no reason why they should not do this," said Mrs. Wadsworth.

"I did not intend to convey that sense, mamma, but simply to state a reason for it."

"I do not think any one is limited to one and only one complement in all the world. No doubt there are a hundred, may be many more who would be perfectly adapted to the inherited and conventional responses of one's being. For many people are as near soul-similar as they are person-similar. True, there may be *one* somewhere who more nearly fits one's nature than another."

"I have long wondered, mamma, whether a one-sided love, a love excited on the one hand but not responded to on the other, is indeed genuine."

"I think not, Mina. It seems to me to be based on a few elements in the unresponsive one that are suitable, while the rest or other qualities are not suitable. The unloved one has some elements that perhaps repel the love pole of the other."

"An education is not a safe guarantee of wedded bliss," said Mina.

"No. That is an acquired thing, and not an innate, resident, eternal quality, a quality which of course appeals strongest to the essence or being of the other. It is not the acquisitions that take the initiative in winning the attention and fancy and love of the other."

"These are matters, it seems to me, that parents should not command or enforce upon their children, and should never more than advise and wisely direct." Mina was in earnest.

"And I think unselfish, loving, dutiful parents never do meddle in the love affairs of their children, whose future welfare they have at heart."

They had walked the whole length of the Avenue, had seen nothing, no one, nor done any shopping,—so absorbed were they in the conversation.

No mention direct had been made of Prof. P. Thomas Nelson, but both had him in mind. They were perfectly conscious that his name had not been mentioned, and each took this as a significant fact deep in the mind of the other. In the minds and hearts of these two men there is a great gulf, like that between Lazarus in Abraham's bosom and Dives, between decayed titular aristocracy and mental aristocracy. In this day of easy divorce and the Salome dance, many seem to have become marriage-mad, and the press teems with divorce scandals and unhappy marriages in high life, and the public really wonders whether marriage is a failure and whether God did not make a mistake in making male and female,—“in his own image.” In a few years that hideous old gossip, curiosity-stricken slanderer, and ruthless thing, a “judicial” court, drags forth a

ghastly family skeleton into public light, exposing an unholy, diabolical sexual union.

To say truth, this was a stone that Miss Mina Wadsworth was not going to stumble over. Anything else but a misogynist, nevertheless she was not seeking matrimony with any doubts or risks in it. She felt disgraced, humiliated over this affair, and the very air seemed heavier than usual. That he could proceed so far and compromise her good name, drag it in the slime with his,—who would not repudiate such a wretch. “O, the crime of his deception!” she cried in her heart in tears. His wooing never had the clear ring of seriousness in it; she never was deceived by his cold, correct words; she never was in love with him; she did not know why she allowed him to proceed with his wooing, when there was never the remotest feeling in her heart that she would answer him affirmatively. And she never suspected there ever would be. It was her boast that she was “heart whole and fancy free,” and now what would the public think of her, a featherweight girl, put upon by a low-cunning English Earl. This thought took a morally dramatic intensity in her mind.

It was indeed fortunate that she had not been longer under the snakey spell of the man, who was as bloodless as the morally dead, as cruel as Agamemnon who would sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to appease Artemis, as selfish as the most extremely brutal man that ever dwelt on the earth. O she had many—every—reason to be glad she had been delivered from the toils of this moral villain. “I must have been hypnotized. Telepathy tells me he is a Svengali and I a Trilby.” Her general attitude all

along toward him was that of flattered and flattering indifference, and not repulsion or reception. It was but a passing matter, all told; but he had designedly impressed the public another way, and this was all in his favor and quite to the girl's harm.

The Professor's letter was a genuine, clean-cut bit of pleasure, a ray of real bright sunlight through her dark, cloudy sky. She had grown reticent and retiring, in shame of it all. The letter was a great uplift, like a bit of good news to one long absent from home without a word.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE uttermost ends of the earth were being searched for Nero Pensive, and as yet he seemed to have been swallowed up in the sea. He was a criminal, and a fugitive from justice. The badge-distinguished minions of the law were busy as small people generally can be. But they dredged and drag-netted the earth in vain.

Peter Wilkins and Clever Hesperus, stimulated by the character and nature of the case and the prominence of the people in it, were turning heaven and earth over with something more effective than Archimedes' imaginary lever,—electricity,—and the villain was still at large. Nero seemed to have made his exit from earth, and sunk into silence in some unknown, unmarked grave. However, these attorneys well knew that dogged persistence is the way to luck and success. It was hardly necessary to inform Scotland Yard of him, for he would give these sleuths and petty Nick Carters a wide berth, to be sure. Still no stone must be left unturned. He must—be—found!

They asked Prof. P. Thomas Nelson what he had discovered, and he wrote substantially what Mith Gulliver had already related about him and his family. He was not the entailed heir, therefore titleless. The real heir was then in Parliament. The family was highly reputed, and stood in the rank of the best English people. But this

fellow, Nero, was the blacksheep and had been abandoned by the honorable members of the family to the destiny he was carving out for himself. They had no idea he would weather very long the storm he was raising upon himself by his masterly course of social perversity. A man's sins find him out; and so does his destiny.

The facts obtained in Europe only intensified the immoral, criminal life of the degenerate. The imposition he had practiced upon ex-Senator Wadsworth and his daughter excited the ex-Senator to a wrathful tension that would know no defeat in uncovering the rascal. He should not go as free as the murderer of Snell years before in Chicago, or Schnauble, the real bomb-thrower in the anarchist movement in Chicago in 1886, or Eugene Aram. Unless he was buried in the bottom of the sea like McGinty, they would unearth him, and he should have the wrath of Justice laid on him. The ex-Senator was not a man to stand for any such foolishness as he had practiced on his family.

The Thaw-White tragedy had been a nine-days' wonder, and the people in Washington City were saying that wonders never cease. The outrageous assault upon the two harmless, defenceless girls by four nervy (?) men was a "joke" for Peter Wilkins.

As the search for the missing man proceeded, more and more facts about the family cropped out, just as such things usually do.

It was said, among other things, that far back in the annals of the family, even in the traditional period of its history, some one of the family of Romanies had pronounced a curse on the race of Pensives for some gross

injustice done these vagrant people by the lordly Pensives. Tradition says this Romany drew blood from his veins, wrote the curse on paper with his life ichor, declaring that every generation of the Pensives should have a vagabond member who would disgrace the name. The cause of the ire of the Romany was his arrest and false imprisonment under the charge of being a thief and a vagabond. The proud-souled Romany would not lie down under the charge peaceably, and he told the lordly presence that he should neither thrive nor advance in honors and that his years should be less than the time allotted man,—that success did not always perch upon one and the same banner nor defeat croak over the other. In some part of the earth for all time to come his seed should be scattered in disgrace and his name bandied around in dishonor. Many times should the family be brought to its knees, perform genuflexions, not by the ecstasies of love or joy or the consolations of religion, but in humiliation and disgrace. This prophecy, or curse has been literally fulfilled, so said, in every generation of the Pensives.

In the capital of New Caledonia a few years ago, the French guillotined one of their convicts. This island was the most important of the French penal colonies. Many of the convicts were assembled in chains to witness the execution of a condemned prisoner, a ruffian, a "tough citizen." The poor wretches felt the terrors of the occasion. They knew the guilty fellow deserved beheading, but they were not brought there merely to be able to testify to the justness and masterfulness of the execution, but to be terrorized into docility and obedience. The

little procession, consisting of the man about to die, the executioners, the priest, and a few of the prison attendants, appeared moving in slow and solemn step, the very tread accented with death. When the sharp command rang out, "Convicts, on your knees! Doff your hats!" the warders drew their revolvers and the troops leveled their pieces. Every convict fell upon his knees. Not to do so would be *lèse majesté*, punishable by death. It was a strong scene, impressive, exciting, decisive. The condemned man asked leave to say a few words, moved by the desire to lengthen out his life even a few miserable minutes, and so he talked and talked at a rambling gait, merely to delay himself a precious moment on the shores of time,—this side of eternity. This fact became perceptible in a few minutes, and the deputy governor, stage-master of the scene before the final drop of the curtain, signaled for the drums to beat and drown his voice. Then he was seized, strapped down to the guillotine board, and the merciless knife tripped. The decapitated body was put into a basket, his head held aloft by one of the ears for a moment and then cast also into the basket, and the execution was over, and law retired satisfied with justice that exacted life and took it. The law had sent a guilty Pensive, Nero's uncle, into life everlasting, with the idea that equal and exact justice to all alike demanded it. The Gypsy's prophecy, written in blood, was vividly recalled by the family dwelling quietly on the entailed estate in England. And now here was another one guilty of escapades, to speak of them mildly, or misdemeanors, that enmeshed him in the toils of the law.

Tracing the history of this family Peter Wilkins and Clever Hesperus, a very valuable and persistent man in this sort of work, resurrected some things that look freakish. One son married an extremely pretty young girl out of the Gaiety theatre company, and then another son, an organ-grinder, thought the descent in the family into the depths of piquant lowness and sharp disgrace justified him in asking the courts to restore the title of Viscount to him, the organ-grinder. He was not sustained in his claim by the courts.

One in Italy committed a horrible crime. He was very poor, but his sweetheart was willing he should seek a fortune in America before they married. In the jealousy of his heart and the tyranny of his love he swore his lovely Italian sweetheart to eternal constancy in his absence. Then they parted for an indefinite time, not to exceed ten years. For five years they corresponded with faithful regularity, and then her letters grew to longer intervals and finally ceased. Then he determined to return to Italy and find out the reason for the unaccountable cessation of the letters. She might be dead. She could not be unfaithful, for she had pledged her fealty to him by solemn oath. Just as he was on the point of returning he learned that she had married. Then his love turned to hate, and then to madness. He reached Italy, and passing himself as an itinerant dentist secured some dental work from his former sweetheart. While pretending to operate on her teeth, he cruelly, madly, exultantly tore out her tongue. It was an awful deed. The poor young, innocent wife died. Then some citizens, maddened at the crime,—crime was not

strong enough word,—caught the brutal savage, tied him to the heels of a furious horse, not entirely unlike Mazzeppa, or Hector to the car of Achilles, or the defender of Gaza to the chariot of Alexander, and lashed the wild animal at the start into its highest speed. He was dragged at a runaway pace for more than two miles. Not a bone of his body was whole.

As Peter Wilkins said in his characteristic manner,—“this settled both tongues and both hearts.” Many events were brought to light relative to the untitled members of this Pensive race that were certainly very shocking, showing either a perversity of disposition or a cursed destiny. The other section of the family bearing the title and the honors, the inheritor of the large estate, had maintained itself in tact, and if it had not advanced, had not declined.

One of the landless sons married by proxy, disgraced himself, and deserted his spouse and his country.

The erstwhile friends,—or victims,—of Nero Pensive heard through a press dispatch, some time afterward, that the “Earl” had a meteoric career in South America, where he left a dizzy trail of forged checks, bad debts, “touching” his friends as he could, and dashing career as “Earl.” He married a wealthy Spanish heiress in the Argentine Republic, robbed her as far as he could, and then abandoned her in less than two months. His education, his polish, his cleverness, his audacity were passports into good society everywhere. He concocted any sort of story about his family greatness and himself, and won his way on family laurels never performed. He had a “swell” automobile, lived a touch of fancy with his lovely, duped young bride;

and suddenly vanished, as if translated to Avernus as Elijah was to heaven.

A cablegram from Peter Wilkins to the authorities in Bonos Ayres to arrest him was the tip that practically divorced the Spanish senora and sent her frail hubby flying to the uttermost ends of the earth. But the two young, assiduous lawyers had not given over the chase. They declared with considerable animation that they would pursue him even to his hole in the earth.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CLARISSA HARLOW, Alice, and Mina were at length admitted at the hospital to see Dean McBarron. So desperate was his condition understood to be, that they entered his room with hushed tread. But yet they knew him now to have passed the critical point and on the road to speedy recovery.

Indeed he was greatly pleased to see them. He, from his couch, greeted them as sunnily, as if he were the one conferring sunshine instead of needing and receiving it. Their coming greatly restocked his always abundant supply of optimism. He was so constituted that he saw light where others saw shadows, saw gold where others saw fool's gold, saw love where others saw hate. The truth is that all things go in pairs, the one the opposite or reverse of the other. In the order of creation things can't exist otherwise.

He received the news with alert intellect that Nero Pensive had made good his escape, though Peter Wilkins and Clever Hesperus were prying open every secret crevice of the earth to find him. He expressed the hope that they might yet overtake him, and his visitors echoed his hope. Their coming had inspired him with a new reason for surviving his dangerous wound, for now he desired to lend a hand in ferreting out this corrupt, obdurate, polluted, base degenerate.

It was not long until he was released from the hospital, and he proceeded forthwith to the open-doored home of Ex-Senator Wadsworth, where he was royally welcomed.

It was a sunny, golden day in September, and the very air so balmy and dreamy smote the cheeks like angels' carresses. Dean had been in the hospital a long time, and summer had apparently come to a point where melancholy lingered about her in mere hints as yet, or perhaps, better, where everything suggested prophesies of the near future weather. But it was a joy, like a fresh young dream, to Dean to be alive and once more out in the midst of the thrilling living throng.

He was welcomed at the Wadsworth home by three young ladies and Mrs. Wadsworth in a manner that made him feel that all people are not fickle in friendship. They sat under the shade of the stately tree in the yard, and there Dean revealed his life, being solicited to do so, and also feeling it now his duty to disclose himself to his friends.

When Clarissa was a songstress of international repute, Dean met her. There was mutual interest at once aroused between them, and their acquaintance widened into love. Lord Francis Deepdown had divorced his wife, and was annoying Clarissa with his gallantry imposed upon her. He even offered her his wife's diamonds said to be worth \$100,000. The ex-wife, a vivacious and certainly a very striking woman in figure and face, made a world-around trip with a French count after her divorce. She was said to be a "charmingly spoiled girl," a "soft, velvety, sweet-caressing girl-wife," but she was a violently jealous-hearted woman, and peace is never present where the

"green-eyed monster" rules like a Richard III. And jealousy needs no proof. Once enthroned, it is guilty of sins that a deluge could not wash away.

She followed her husband. One day she entered the hotel rotunda in London and confronted her husband who had intercepted Clarissa and was holding brief, nervous converse with her. Dean was standing near, conversing for a brief moment with Clarissa. The mad wife approached the husband, called him an unprintable name, aroused herself to fury, flashed a revolver on him, and fired. The ball missed its aim, but hit Dean. He fell. The would-be murderess flung down the revolver, screamed, and fled.

"Here is the evidence of her marksmanship," Dean pointed out, brushing aside the hair at his temple and showing a bullet scar.

The wound was not as serious as at first imagined, and he was soon again frequenting his normal haunts.

The guilty wife of Lord Deepdown disappeared, and her repudiated spouse and Lord refused to pursue her. This scandal and assault in a public place was so recited in the public press that the reading public was astonished and aroused.

It was now that Dean and Clarissa learned that Nero Pensive was in America, and Clarissa followed him. The reader is conversant with their lives somewhat in detail since their arrival in the United States, their own native country.

What Mith Gulliver said of Dean had no foundation in fact, except that Dean imposed a long imaginary tale upon him one idle hour.

CHAPTER XXXIX

DEAN'S life reminiscences, told with original spice and humorous conclusions, at much more length than appears here, were listened to with much delight, and laughter was loud when he depicted the ludicrous situations with much larger and more pointed force than the Pickwickian delineator would perhaps have done it, and perhaps with less breadth of humor than would the chronicler of *Roughing It* and *Gilded Age*.

He at length returned to his very early boyhood days, and said:

"I'd give a fortune, if I could unearth one little sister I met long, long ago, when she was less than five and I about eight. She wouldn't flinch from fire, and was as brave as leal."

"Where did you meet her?" asked Alice thoroughly interested.

"In South Dakota."

"Was she pretty?" asked Clarissa with a laughing shrug.

"Cheeks like the peach blossom, eyes like the ashy sky, hair like silk woof, lissome as the bouyant boughs that sway gracefully in the summer wind, lovely as an angel, brave as the greatest hero in your family present or past, playful as a kitten, laughter that gurgled like music confined, the sweetest little hoyden that ever ran a race with a

boy. Such she is as I remember her. She may be dead."

"What a splendid tribute!" cried Mina joyfully.

"You have thought of her often," said Mrs. Wadsworth, implying that much and often thinking had drawn her portrait in his mind in the glittering touches of imagination, and hung up a noble painting in the corridors of his memory.

"She's a beautiful child dream," he returned lovingly.

"What so stamped her upon your mind?" asked Clarissa, as one merely encouraging him to give details.

"May I tell the story, after all I have just said about myself?"

"That's what we're all trying to draw out of you," said two at once.

"It's personal. It's not so ancient that I need to begin with the stereotyped beginning of the building of bird's nests in old men's beards, nor end with the kettle of tea. It was, however, about two decades ago, in the 'wild, woolly west.' Out there they called my father 'Chuck' McBarron. He was a good cowpuncher, and managed to make a living rounding up cattle for himself and me, his only child. My mother was dead, and my first days were days of strain and stress and hardship. When the annual round-ups were over, my father trapped some and helped out with carrying the government mail.

"One season Harry Dickson asked my father to help him round-up his cattle on the range, and my father liking and needing the employment put on his sombrero, took his quirt, bounced upon a pony of mercurial turn, and went on with the rest of the cowpunchers to bring the cattle to a corral. Dickson was rich as cream, but he didn't know

it, and so might as well not have been rich at all. He had a family that were unblessed with unknown opportunities within their reach. But his little niece, she whom I have just described, was there from the east with her mamma visiting. While the cattle were being branded she and I became playmates and watched the branding, a strange new thing to both of us. She was a wilful little soul, with curly brown hair, dark brown eyes that scintillated in the darkness, and she was a fairy despot ruling her kind mother. The cattle were roped, thrown down, and I remember the brand, which was a tiny heart. The red-hot iron burnt and sizzled, when pressed on the shoulder of the bellowing cattle. We watched the operation with bulging eyes and excited hearts, for it was cruelty to animals. At a moment when the branding-iron was not in use and the men had gone off a short distance for some purpose that I do not recall now, this little brave girl turned suddenly to me, and frankly said:

“‘I like you. Let me brand you.’

“‘I’m afraid it will hurt,’ I said like a coward.

“‘Don’t be a big ’fraid cat. Come on,’ she sneered and took hold of me.

“‘Oak-eh! No! It’ll burn,’ and I shrank back.

“‘No-h it won’t. I ain’t afraid,’ she said. And so she pleaded, and so I demurred. Of course it was the same old story of the Syren—the boy finally yielded. She snatched up the hot brand, I exposed my bare shoulder, and she dabbed the hot iron and pressed a tiny heart on my shoulder,—her uncle’s brand. And I’m one of his strays to-day.”

“Is the heart there yet?” asked Clarissa.

Dean McBarron shifted his feet and hands, and looked up in the deep foliage overhead. Mina walked round to another seat. Alice had been pacing up and down an imaginary line upon the grass. Mrs. Wadsworth sat with eyes fixed upon the monologist, absorbed in his rather unusual tale.

"Aye, indeed is it, and a proud mark too it is. That blistering iron hurt, to be sure, and the tears leaped up. But I tried hard not to wince, but to be brave for the little darling's sake. I gritted my teeth, and she marked me without a tremor. Then she said, so like one with a superior soul, 'You weren't afeerd a tal,' and she patted the seared brown heart that fairly glowed. I said: 'Course I wasn't' choking back the big tears. It was over, and then I was brave enough, you see. We are all alike, I think sometimes. I could hardly keep back the truant, errant, wilful, confessing tears. I snapped them off my lids, and tried to laugh, as if I thought it a rich joke. Then she ran in front of me, held the hot iron out, and commanded: 'Now you brand me. Put one on me. We must be alike.' 'O gracious no!' I fairly gasped, or ought to if I did not. 'No. Why I couldn't do that. It would hurt you. Burn!' 'It wouldn't hurt any more than it did you. An' you're no better than I am. If you can stand it, guess I can too. An' I want one, too. An' I'm goin' to have it.' 'But—.' 'Here, quick now.' There was no help for it. Her little white shoulder was bared for the sacrifice, as it seemed, and I stuck the tiny heart upon her shoulder, the same as mine, the left one. She gritted her teeth, set her lips tight, and bore the burn without a whimper.

'Now you've got one too,' said I. 'We won't tell what we've done,' she said in a tone that meant a secret. The tears budded upon her lids and fell off, but she did not touch. 'No, I guess we won't,' I said, knowing well what I'd get if we did. And I acknowledge I always had a wholesome dread of hickory oil. It left such a bad taste in my mouth.

"The branding of the cattle was finished next day, and then my father took me away back to our cabin on the plains. That very same night a prairie fire sprang up, swept all before it, and our humble home perished, and the prairie was an ashen, blackened desert. And then we drifted or blew into the Black Hills, settled there, and the years rolled on into the illimitable hades of the dead—dead—past! And I never heard of the sweet, brave little girl again. My father became a mine prospector, took up some claims, and before he died became immensely rich. I inherited his pelf; but it was not satisfactory. It held very much less than all of life for me. So I drifted east, a young man of eighteen, entered a literary college, was graduated, studied law, but never practiced it, and by that time discovered that some longing emotions for real friends were mine, and that I had some ugly desires to rove."

"What was the little girl's name?" asked Clarissa in the most natural way possible.

"Really I can't tell you," he laughed. "She was a tiny thing, a prairie flower, seen only for a few days, and I a mere boy, and so if I ever knew her name I've long ago forgotten it. But the little incident of our branding each other has never been out of my mind."

"Why don't you advertise for her?" suggested Mina. "It would be indeed romantic to find your little western sweetheart that way. I should be happy to see the outcome of all this."

"She may be dead," suggested Clarissa; or a famous beauty about to marry some foreigner as cashless as his title is empty."

"O," cried Alice, clapping her hands and whirling on toes till her skirts flared in bell-hape, "O, how touching! But sure, now, I'm not sneering. I was thinking of her possible life since, and trying to construct it in my mind. Now, what was her life? I'll bet I can depict it to a dot." And she laughed.

"That belongs to Mina. She writes novels," said Clarissa.

"Naturally," assented Dean.

"But I've no idea, and Alice has," said Mina, a declension in her tone.

"Go on, Alice," cried Mrs. Wadsworth. "Tell us her life. We'll take it for granted, as you tell it, that it will be as wild and tense as any Bret Harte story."

"To begin with then," and Alice made an elaborate movement of lips and frisky quaver of eyes, as if she were hyperbolically serious. "She grew, and she grew, and she grew,—not unlike the fabled turnip,—and she grew into a charming girl. And no doubt she was much like the Sleeping Beauty waiting for the Prince Charming to come along and carry her off, something in the fashion the Highland Chieftain did Lord Ullin's daughter, or as young Lochinvar did his bride. She had a doting father who granted her every wish. He educated her in

our eastern colleges. She could ride *a la* cowboy, and shoot the center nine times in ten as she galloped past the target, and fish like old Walton himself, and at the same time bake a cake with the best of them. And she could dress,—my, she could outshine the fabled beauties of courts! She had all the graces, the perfect beauty, and the sweetness of one of the most lovely women on earth. Men fairly bowed down and worshipped her, and her beauty became the type and the vogue. She was the leading belle of society, and the ladies were all madly jealous of her. And when women become furiously jealous of another woman, they make, or can make, it most unlovely for her. She traveled in the Old World, met all the famous court beauties, was admired by Kings but not by queens, and had in her train all the men with love-trained eyes and skilled judgment of beautiful women. And as a conclusion of her splendid social career she married a count.”

“A Cuvier,” suggested Dean, complimenting her reconstruction of the character from a mere hint.

“A beautiful fancy,” said Mina.

“But not true,” said Clarissa.

“We’ll say it is a true fable by way of compromise,” said the very gracious Mrs. Wadsworth.

“I can see,” said Alice, “that here was my opportunity for a little humor, a little invention, a little grace, a little literary accomplishment; but I signally failed—failed as heavily as the fall of lead.”

“Not so wretchedly as that,” said Mina, with an eye crinkled half shut to express a humor that her words could not.

"Yes. But I only regret the infliction on you of such dead, wooden stuff, and do not regard myself. I can stand all you may think, and know that you are too polite to tell all you think." Alice jumped up and down on her toes several times because she could not help it, or because she had not even paused to notice just what she was doing.

All the while Clarissa used the graphite with studied industry, and now she read what she had written as an advertisement. It ran:

"If the young man who branded a tiny heart on the left arm of his little girl playmate twenty years ago, while upon a western ranch, and who wears a similar sign on his own arm, will write to C. H., Washington City, he will learn something of great interest to himself."

"That's an ad.," laughed Clarissa, turning archly toward Dean, while a singular light gleamed in her dusky eyes.

"But this is an ad, for *you*, and not for Dean," Alice hastily interposed.

"Well," said Clarissa.

"But then it is nothing to you."

"Well," said Clarissa.

"Why did you write it that way?"

"Because *I* wanted the lad that branded me twenty years ago on my uncle Dickson's ranch in the wild, woolly west."

Every eye was bent upon her, and no words can express the exact status of feeling and eye-glisten. Dean—

well he looked like a man who had leaped over a precipice and was still falling through the air.

"You!" said Dean more like a sharp cry of surprise than of inquiry.

"Yes, I'm the kid you branded," said Clarissa.

"No. I'm from Missouri," said Dean in the parlance of the hour, slang ever young to the young, ever old to the old, ever the same to Him who created time itself.

Clarissa, taking him at his word, hastily, bared her shoulder, and invited him to look, if he was from Missouri. There was in very truth a distinct tiny heart burnt and cicatrized in her tender white shoulder. Then Dean seized her impetuously, imprinted a kiss fervently upon her rubric lips, and pressed her like a sister to his heart. And Clarissa fully reciprocated the caresses. It was like the meeting of long lost brother and sister. All congratulated them, and felt indeed that they were real participants in a real romance. Dean himself doubted himself, and did not know for a few moments whether he were happy or unhappy. Even matronly good Mrs. Wadsworth kissed Clarissa and then kissed Dean, so far had the combined emotion gone recklessly aside from the standard code of exhibiting feelings. She congratulated them on their "good fortune," and shook their hands with a film of water over her eyes that fairly blinded her. Alice—she practically danced the grass off the sward in her ecstasy. Mina was not quite so freakish emotionally, and with decent composure she congratulated them.

On the first lull in the stormy demonstration Dean exposed the brand of a tiny heart on his left shoulder, and

all proof needed to establish the verity of the tale was thus added.

"And now," said Dean an hour later, "it deepens on me that it was fate that directed me to you in London not long since."

"Was mine the little girl's name?" she asked.

"Yes, that was it, I now recall."

"And neither then knew, nor afterward, that the hand of destiny was over us," said Clarissa.

"And when we repudiate destiny and go our own way, the result is a failure every time," Dean speculated.

"I know marriage then is a failure," said Clarissa.

"Are you now assured of your true destiny?" Dean asked as a matter of course.

"I'm sure."

Dean put his hand up to the tender scar upon his neck. The bandage felt a little constricting.

CHAPTER XL

OF course Dean McBarron entered into the prosecution of the criminals with all the zeal of a novice, and with all the seriousness of one who would be avenged for injuries received. He became associate counsel with Peter Wilkins and Clever Hesperus.

The three men immured for the assault on Clarissa and Alice in "The Cottage" were found guilty, and sentenced to an indeterminate term in prison. When the prisoners were led away to be sent to confinement, Clever Hesperus, looking at the poor dogs, said:

"It seems like a needless waste of life, if it is not inappropriate here to philosophize a bit, to force these men into straits out of the great current of humanity in which all good is best done, and leave society the loser by so much as they might have done as good citizens."

"The possibility of being a useful citizen, I think," said Peter Wilkins, tossing away a broken and unlighted cigar that he had held in his mouth some time, "is given to every man in the start, but he warps in the growth and drifts into evil, and that continually, after his nature has received its growth and become fixed and hardened and unalterable by time. Then it is that he is everlastingly established that way by fate. The nature was given him at first to fix, settle, determine his career as a good citizen or a bad.

The possibilities were his in the start, and destiny had decreed that he *must* be one or the other."

"So many of us spoil life and make it a comedy of errors," said Dean McBarron, as the trio went out of the court-house at the end of the trial. They became mute for a moment.

"I hear we have a trace of Nero Pensive," said Peter, looking up at Dean.

"Where is he?" quickly, significantly.

"Not in hades but hesperus,—Manilla."

"Poor citizen there—a refugee," said Dean.

"I cabled for his arrest," said Peter.

"That man, sir, to be close in analysis, was a scamp of the first water, and won by his clever deceptions and his habitual fine manners," said Clever Hesperus, a sort of Senator Beveridge stately space between words.

This trio went to the Wilkins-Hesperus office, and resumed the consideration of the trial through which they had just passed victoriously. It is needless to follow the legal methods taken to establish the truth of Mith Gulliver's confession; suffice it to say once for all that the evidence convicted him and his pals and sent them to the penitentiary, as already stated.

"That Mith Gulliver is the greatest Ananias since Ananias," said Peter in his old style of humor.

Mina was telling Clarissa and Alice the news she had from Olive Pendell. She said that Olive wrote that her old friend and ex-fiancé, Lawrence Dunston, had asked her to sponge the unsavory record of him out of her memory, and let him begin over again and make a new name

and position for himself in her heart, and then he would ask her judgment upon him. He said to Olive that God forgave, and forgot,—blotted out,—the wrongs one did, provided he asked Him,—that was God's requirement from man and was his law,—and he asked her to be charitable with him and give him "another chance."

"Will she?" asked Alice.

"It seems he hasn't asked to be a suitor," said Clarissa.

"But that is what it practically amounts to, and so Olive understands it," said Mina.

"Then to let him come back as far as he asks is practically to concede he may be a suitor again," said Alice.

They were on the afternoon veranda at the Wadsworth home, not a palace, not a mansion, not a castle, but a fine modern American home with every modern blessing.

A cablegram to Mina from Prof. Nelson said he would be ready to leave England and return home on the next day. Mina read the message out to her mother and the two girls.

Many had observed Mina's latent habit of thoughtless humming—anything—but chiefly the last ditty that she had sung. So at this moment she fell abstractedly into humming "Red Wing," and Alice smiled at Clarissa, conveying some interchange of thought unexpressed in vocalized thought-medium. Mina saw not this aside conference. And it would have altered nothing if she had.

It was a sweet satisfaction to Mrs. Wadsworth to notice the contentment of the two world-waifs and know her instrumentality had assisted to redeem them and

give them happiness and a home,—a haven of refuge from the fury of the relentless world. It pleased her to see their punctiliousness in their conduct. They had needed parental protection and direction, and they were innately glad that they could rest in the true confidence and beautiful sympathy and kindly concern of this mother in whom there was no guile. They were acclimating themselves to the demands of a correct home, and they became perfectly dutiful and obedient and trustful and willing.

It was Alice's greatest wish that she should not be thought heartless. She declared she would never again commit an escapade that would bring the disgrace of a public newspaper notice and perhaps a cut with it. And she prayed Mrs. Wadsworth never to let those press quidnuncs say any more horrid things about her. Alice's parents being dead, she had a great and dangerous wealth thrust upon her at an age when wealth most easily becomes one's jugernaut. She wisely spent some of it in judicial personal charity upon the submerged tenth directed by her lovely patron mother. The girl had been indiscreet, she herself confessed with regret, but had never been guilty of any great moral or mortal wrong. She had been eccentric and highly willful, before she had settled into dignity of character,—the very worst that could be said of her. She was a lovely, good, talented, kind girl, and she won her place into another's heart by sheer force of love given first. Her motives were right, but impulses wrong and over-developed and over-indulged and over-trained.

Peter Wilkins knew all about the girl, knew well her

father who was an eminent New York physician. He died suddenly on an ocean voyage, and not long afterward the mother died, leaving the girl rich and alone, the prey of every venal shark that heard of her. But she was a girl of great force of character, and she easily put the adventurers all behind her. That was one of her pet eccentricities, to "turn the wretches down."

She and Peter were knit together in fire-new, best-burnished friendship, and rumors of "intentions" were current.

It was a disheveled October morning, and sullen as a dishonored citizen or a devil in mad drama, and Mina wondered how they would spend the day.

They were again at their country home, Acadie, at Walpole. Clarissa and Alice and Mina and a chauffeur had been chasing over the country in a touring-car for many days, and for spice and relief from the bane of monotony eating a midday dinner in some town or village and returning home in the evening. The splendid ozone of October put new blood and therefore new impulses in them, and tinged the cheeks a beautiful nutbrown.

Now, on this unpromising October morning a letter came to Mina from Prof. Nelson saying he would be in Richmond on the morrow. Of course she knew he had arrived from England, and she also knew his first duty was to report to President Roosevelt. Hence he would not be able first to "pay his devoirs," as the *élite* used to say, to the one woman of all women who occupied a chief place in his mind and heart. He was confident, knowing the possibility of mistaking, that she entertained no repulsive opinion of him. But in this latter, mind-dissipating

day the instability of the sentiments of young people is marked,—a fact demonstrably shown by the divorce courts. However, he thought he could safely trust in the fidelity and loyalty and stability of sentiment of Miss Mina Wadsworth.

After reading the letter from the Professor they engaged in a game of whist, still undecided what should be the chief "stunt" of the day, as Alice put it. Mina never had the courage to use slang. Mina stole listlessly, restlessly through the many rooms of this country residence, sitting like a gloomy bump in the gloom on the elevation. She looked out upon the mist and the soppy fields and woods beyond. There was a sinister look upon the general aspect of nature, and a wail, as it were a token of impending winter, came up the hill in silence and took mystic speech under the eaves of the house. And all the folks at the home took notice that Mina was affected with a "tone of mind." Alice said banteringly it was a "tone of heart" that would not mend till Dr. Cupid was called in.

But the next morning was one with a golden sun peeping over the eastern horizon with a benignant smile and a bow of promise, as it were, for the day, declaring the day could not fail to be a blessing to a normal mind and heart.

The Professor came as he said, and was met at the Walpole station by the three girls in a trap. The greeting of Mina by the Professor seemed to be no more direct, attentive, effusive, pointed, fervent than to the rest. And yet Mina read a gladness in his eyes that was not to be seen by any one, except on whom the oculist Cupid had put his highly colored "specs," very like those Major Jack Downing mentioned as used by President Jackson when

he wished to see things in a self-flattering condition. Alice was particularly careful to seem not to be "seeing things," and yet most acutely attentive spying their acts, looks, words and special and singular movements, at this first meeting. She confessed to herself that she was disappointed in that she observed nothing. A scansorial bird hammered the telegraph pole near where Alice stood furtively looking, yet not looking, and she looked up at the bird that had "butted in," as it were. She shot a contemptuous and rebuking glance at it. And then she regretted that there was a moment when she had taken away her eyes, for it is then that "things happen, when one isn't looking, you know." But the truth is she had seen all.

Clarissa was not so sensitively conscious as to taking observations as Alice was, and yet she looked clandestinely out of the corners of her eyes. But she saw nothing like a demonstrative love symptom. He was either a very shy and prudent wooer, or else he was not very ardent. Sly wooers are the best. But a heartless one is soon set aside. Lovers must be men of real flesh and blood, or they are not desirable.

They got into the trap and returned to Acadie. The autumn had removed the color of all vegetation and the earth looked as if setting into a sombre winter overcoat. The beautiful flowers of the lawn had given up their mid-summer glory, and the cleamatis and the woodbine had the pallor of death upon them. The sad and disastrous had come as the heralds of winter, and the winds were already making needful the storm-doors.

Of a poetic turn, the Professor spoke of the alteration of

the wonderful color of joyous nature, and of the sombre and drear and brown that were settling like a pall on all things. These changes spoke

“Of wailing winds and naked woods,
And meadows brown and sear.”

At the home he greeted Mrs. Wadsworth with perfect gentlemanly dignity and attention, and she met him with a kindly smile that she gave to everybody.

Time was no longer heavy on Mina's hands, everybody noticed. She and the Professor had many private interviews and many rambles in the touring-car with the other two girls added to their gay jaunts.

It was an open secret that Prof. P. Thomas Nelson was on the point of delivering a new book to the printer, in which he had embodied some of the facts and conclusions he had gathered about English socialism while in England.

Mina had already handed over her MS. to publishers, but she would tell none of her friends a single thing about the plot, saying that to do so would mar their interest in the story, and she flattered herself her friends would certainly honor her by reading it.

The truth is that Prof. Nelson was lionized by the girls, and petted as if deserving of everything and yet only received a pitiable fragment of it. He had been dragged about in the dust with the three girls in the “auto,” and viewed the gorgeous late autumn scenery, fairly surfeiting upon it, until familiarity had taken the first keen glow from it, and laughed with the “jolly crowd,” till life seemed connected again with boundless, hopeful, buoyant,

glowing boyhood. All the tourists would come back in the evening gray "the worse for the wear," Clarissa put it, dusty and barbarous in spirit, so rowdyish did the fine fresh air inoculate them with the Darwinian ancestral antecedent spirit. The Professor came to look "rusty," he allowed, and added that "he appeared as one that had been dug up in the country and transplanted into the city, and was just beginning to take root in the new soil." They all rejoiced in the soil, were glad a kind Providence had not interdicted them this privilege, and entertained a manly (there is no neuter or sächlich term), healthy uplift toward a beneficent Creator.

One lovely Indian summer evening, in the last distinct rays of the setting sun, as a hush lay upon the subdued land and a poise and pause seemed to have come upon all animated nature, Mina and Prof. Nelson were strolling along the hedge, sentimental fashion, when the nerved-up Professor unequivocally "put the question direct," the question of all questions that shapes immediate destinies and compels a hereditary destiny upon unborn generations, the most vital question that concerns mortal men.

It is needless to repeat all they said. With possible variation in the inflection of tone and words, not the sentiment, it was the same sweet emotion that possessed Adam and Eve. And has been repeated substantially to each other in the same way by every descendant of the primal citizens upon the earth. It was what our grandfathers and our parents whispered to each other in all confidence and in such all-glowing sweetness and hope and love. It was what you said when you proposed, and what will be said to you, young lady, when *he* proposes to you. It is

the divine decree to love, declared in Genesis first chapter and twenty-eighth verse, and it was given to all animate nature as declared in the same chapter and twenty-second verse. Those that do not love, are violators of God's law implanted in their being.

The Professor had plucked a spray of dingy golden-rod, and Mina was repeating a sprightly incident that had been related to her one day recently when dining in a country hotel. A sweet little girl, about seven years of age, had often listened to her father declaim in animated language from the sacred desk. He was a tender father in his home, forgiving like Christ rather than like the austere Elohim-Jehovah. And the little thing loved her father with a trustfulness that might well be imitated in more homes than it is. One day she heard her father, in his clerical capacity, preach a fiery sermon on the "justice of God." At the conclusion, shocked with the picture her father drew of the unapproachable King of Kings, she hid her face in her mother's arm, and cried in fear: "O, mamma, I wish God were as good as papa!" Sweet little child! Don't be terrorized. Your father in his home had fulfilled the idea of Christ, to suffer little children to come unto him, not to make them afraid but happy. The Professor seemed reticent, turgid, turbid, while in a listening attitude to this story, but when he spoke all this was changed and altogether in his favor.

"And may I say unto you, long loved one, to come unto me, and let no one forbid?" He had turned square to her and paused in his slow walk, as if for an immediate answer. No, Mina was not indifferent when she plucked the faded golden-rod from his hands, and looked up in his eyes, and—

He had his answer without words. She meant to speak, but somehow at the moment it seemed best to tell him without words, the most emphatic speech of all. And yet she said after a hesitancy that he did not misconstrue:

"Frankness, not rudeness, is best always. You have known it long,—before you went to England even. There never was a moment when a telepathic motion of soul did not signify concord with your soul-essence. I'm not a fadist, I pray you understand, but one's secret impressions are never wrong. I come unto you, not to be a burden through later developed repulsion of being, but a true help-meet always to the end."

"May God bless this compact," said the Professor more to her than to God.

And there behind the hedge, in the sweet eventide, they plighted their troth and affixed the seal of a pure, sweet first kiss.

One word more.

Nero Pensive perished in a street brawl in Manilla.

His death released Clarissa and Alice, bequeathing acceptable widowhood upon both at once.

Dean McBarron and Clarissa Harlow married. Robert Burns never forsook Dean, and became interested in the Panama canal.

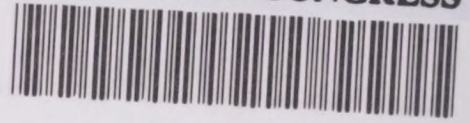
Peter Wilkins and Alice Moore-Greenfield were married in due time.

Clever Hesperus found and married a golden-haired, lovely young widow, named Mrs. Filter Gladden, who thought him the greatest constitutional lawyer in Washington City.

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